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THE CONGREGATIONAL LECTURE.

SECOND SERIES.

THE CAUSES OF THE CORRUPTION OF CHRISTIANITY.

BY THE

REV. ROBERT VAUGHAN.

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THE CAUSES

OF THE

CORRUPTION OF CHRISTIANITY.

BY THE

REV. ROBERT VAUGHAN,

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PREFACE.

It is no doubt true that, to impart a love of pure Christianity, something more is necessary than an intimate acquaintance with its corruptions, or with the causes which have produced them. But if some have expected too much from reflection on topics of this nature, it may be that others expect too little. There are quarters in which it seems to be concluded that enough, and more than enough, has been said about the corruptions of religion; that what is now especially wanting is a more adequate exhibition of its beauty and sanctity. There is a fashion, however, in sentiment, as in other things, and a fashion which often has little to do with wise observation. It may be that what is needed is not the one of these things so much as both. The difference between what is counterfeit and what is genuine may be best ascertained by their being brought together; and an inquiry respecting the causes of the corruptions of Christianity must be very injudiciously

conducted, which does not afford, at almost every step, the advantage of such a comparison. The elements of truth and goodness must be known, before any corruption of the one or the other can be really understood.

Nor can it be matter of doubt with such as have been in frequent intercourse with religious persons, that few minds are more liable to be deluded by the passing phantasies of false religion, than those which, from deeming it enough to adopt certain general and obvious principles, have allowed themselves to remain in ignorance with respect to the impositions practised by those phantasies on the men of other times. It is to me unquestionable, that the persons avowing themselves the most exclusive students of the true, have commonly proved the easiest dupes of the false; they have refused to concern themselves with the records of human folly or deception, and have become victims of the very evils they professed to contemn. Hence it happens that men who err the most in religious speculation, are generally the last to suspect themselves of error.

It is conceded, that in ecclesiastical history, as commonly written, the corruptions of Christianity are so much dwelt upon as to leave but small space for Christianity itself. And what is more to be regretted, these examples of weakness and depravity are not always so disposed of as to leave the mind of the reader free from

injurious impression in regard to the religion with which they are connected. Such matters, if reviewed largely, should have been reviewed philosophically, so as to have made plain their real origin, and to have fixed the broad character of injustice on every attempt to confound such perversions of the christian system with the system itself.

It is in consequence of having been long since constrained to adopt such opinions, that I have ventured to call the attention of the denomination of Christians to which I deem it my honour to belong, and of the public generally, to the subject treated in the present volume. It has been my solicitude to produce a book that may be useful, both as a guard against error and a guide to truth; and one especially, that may be of material benefit to inquisitive youth when entering on the study of ecclesiastical history;—a study which, to be duly profitable, and even free from danger, requires a matured knowledge, and habit of reflection, much beyond what is usually found in connexion with our early life. The relative prominence of the topics introduced has been determined by a regard to this general object.

With what success this object has been prosecuted I must now leave to the decision of others. I have expressed myself freely, but not, I trust, uncourteously. My opinions, I may be permitted to say, are any thing but the result of

early bias or connexion; and though prepared to meet either sacrifice or labour in their cause, it is ever my delight to witness the indications of a devout regard to the blessed Redeemer, with whatever misconception or doubtful feeling that regard may be associated.

R. VAUGHAN.

Kensington, Nov. 25, 1834.

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The Committee deem it proper to state, that whatever responsibility may attach to the reasonings or opinions advanced in any course of lectures, belongs most exclusively to the Lecturer.

Congregational Library,
Blomfield Street, Finsbury, Nov. 1834.

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LECTURE I.

ON THE CORRUPTION OF CHRISTIANITY FROM TENDENCIES IN THE PRESENT CONDITION OF HUMAN NATURE.

LECTURE I.

HOSEA XIV. 9.

"*Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? For the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein.*"

LECT. I.

It is not without a painful measure of diffidence that I have looked forward to the discharge of my present duty. It must be sufficiently obvious, that much more fitness to the task which now devolves upon me might have been found in many of my honoured fathers and brethren. But while some of these have professed themselves more than fully occupied already; in the case of others, there have been circumstances which were deemed incompatible with that degree of immediate attention to an engagement of this nature, which would be indispensable on the part of the Lecturer for the present year. While sensible of the honour

LECT. I.

conferred in my being called to such a service, it would have been more agreeable to me, on many accounts, had my appearance before you been assigned to a distant day. Having stated thus much in my own behalf, and in behalf of others, permit me to call your attention at once to the subject before us.

Corruption of Christianity defined.

In examining the Causes of the Corruptions of Christianity, it will be important that we endeavour to determine what may, or may not be regarded, as matter affecting the purity or perfectness of the revealed system of things which the term Christianity is employed to denote.

The view of this system which first presents itself to an unprejudiced mind, is that of a divinely-appointed remedy, adopted by Infinite Wisdom and Beneficence to the necessities of a fallen world. And whatever shall serve to obscure, or misrepresent, the announcements of the gospel with respect to the moral state of the human race, or as to the nature of its own merciful provisions, we regard as producing a corruption of the christian doctrine. When these communications are mutilated, mixed up with what is repugnant to them, or made conducive to effects foreign from their proper tendency, they are manifestly deteriorated:— they no longer possess their true character, or they are seen in a state of separation from those heavenly aspirations and those benign results

with which, if left to their due course, they will ever be connected. The doctrine of the Trinity; the proper deity of the Saviour; the reality and efficacy of his substitution in the place of the guilty; the personality of the Holy Spirit, together with all his ordinary influences in the regeneration and salvation of the soul,—these we view as essential truths of revelation, truths to which nothing may be added, and from which nothing may be taken.

What we say of the system of doctrine presented in the gospel, we say also of its moral code. In this respect, as in the former, it is sufficient and complete, *that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*

Nor do we hesitate to affirm that the polity and worship appropriate to this last and perfected economy of revealed truth, are so far indicated, in their general principles, in the New Testament, as to make it certain that what has obtained in these respects with the majority of professing Christians, in nearly every age, partakes much less of the simplicity of primitive usage, than of those corruptions in religion which owe their origin to human weakness and depravity. What the general principles now adverted to really are, we shall have occasion to state as we proceed, together with the reasons which induce us to regard them as sufficient, and as of perpetual obligation. In plans of human contrivance

LECT. I. change is not unfrequently an improvement. But with respect to a state of things which Infinite Wisdom has devised, and to which a supreme and unalterable authority is attached, every innovation must be in reality an inroad of corruption, and must partake, according to its extent, of the nature of impiety.*

Complex nature of the causes producing the corruption of Christianity.

But while evil must be thus connected with all such innovations, both in their causes and results, we shall do well to remember that even the corruptions of Christianity have been often overruled for its advantage, and that the causes producing them have generally been of so mixed a description as to render it impossible that human wisdom should ever determine their apportionment of good and evil. Not a few of

* The Fathers often opposed the novelties of their times by reasoning in this manner. But unhappily, the authority of established opinion or usage, or as it would have been designated at a later period,—the authority of the church, was suffered to become confounded with what was peculiar to Christ and his Apostles, and peculiar to them not only in its *measure*, but in its *nature*. "Hanc regulam ab initio Evan-"gelii decucurrisse, etiam ante priores quosque hæreticos, "nedum ante Praxeam hesternum, probabit tam ipsa posteritas "omnium hæreticorum, quam ipsa novellitas Praxeæ hesterni. "Quo peræque adversus universas hæreses, jam hinc præ-"judicatum sit; Id esse verum, quodcumque prius, id esse "adulterum quodcumque posterius."—Tertul. Ad Prax. p. 501. Ed. Paris, 1675. The safety of this rule depends on its being maintained along with a cautious recognition of the peculiar and paramount authority of the inspired writers. The impression of Christianity on mankind has resembled its effect on individuals, its earliest results, if we except the apostolic age, being by no means its purest and noblest.

the occurrences which we are wont to dwell upon, as manifest departures from primitive customs, were rendered serviceable to the cause of Christianity in the altered circumstances of after times;—their supposed utility in reference to that cause being, in many instances, the strongest motive to their adoption. In some instances, the end proposed was altogether impious, and the means by which it was prosecuted were chosen on the most licentious principles. But these, I am willing to think, were often the exceptions rather than the rule. It is more grateful to our sympathies with humanity, and withal more reasonable, to suppose that the general state of feeling was that of persons who verily thought they ought to do the things they did. Fallen as human nature is, causes which are purely evil do not produce any wide or permanent impression in the world. Even despotism, has its admixtures of paternity with lawlessness, that it may be endured. And Mohammedanism itself would have struggled in vain for empire, had not its Hebraic theism given it a strong advantage over that wretched system of creature worship which was all that the Greek Church of the seventh century could bring in opposition to it. It must not be forgotten that the causes which produce a corrupt religion, like those which influence national character, are really innumerable, and are moreover of the most varied and intricate texture.

LECT. I. All censure, accordingly, in relation to this subject, should result from comprehensive knowledge, and be marked by a humane discrimination.

If we fix our eye on some extreme point of corruption, and then regard the state of things before us as the wilful production of a single, or of a very limited agency, it will be proper to connect an appalling amount of guilt with that agency. But it must not be overlooked, that the corruption of Christianity to any great extent has never been the work of a single personage, nor of a single generation. To every such effect an innumerable multitude of persons have become parties, and in modes and degrees which are known only to Omniscience. All are guilty, but each should not be made responsible for the doings of the whole. In such cases, individuals are wont to yield, almost unconsciously, to the powerful current supplied by the general sentiment and usage of the living and the dead. That a religion pure in its principles and tendencies as its Uncreated Parent, should have been so vitiated as to become little else than another form of heathenism, is an event which would seem to fix a guilt on human nature, the heaviest that may be borne! But the decisions of the last day will not have respect to humanity as a whole, but to each of its parts, the destiny of every man being according to his deeds.

Our intentions in these remarks is to show,

that there will often be circumstances requiring an abstinence from unqualified censure, even where much has been done to the injury of Christianity. No man can so have done and be innocent;—but the extenuating facts connected with the deed, may be more numerous, and more considerable, than the passionate polemic is inclined to admit.*

With the same view, we may further observe, in the language of an anonymous writer, that "it is a principle which might almost be affirmed "as universally true, that great changes in the "moral condition of mankind have not been "produced by human agencies designedly "directed towards the accomplishment of those "specific changes. Even if some *apparent* ex- "ceptions to this principle were granted to be "indeed exceptions, it would still appear ge- "nerally to have pleased Him who governs the "world, when he leaves men, with all their "petty force, to urge on the minor movements "of the great machine, yet, to set their faces in a "direction opposite to that in which their efforts "are giving it impulse. Even those who have

* Dr. Browne, in his "Comparative View of Christianity," traces the corruptions of revealed religion to the depravity of human nature, but adds, with much sagacity, that "whatever "is highly valued will naturally be an object of scrupulous "care and of assiduous exertions for its improvement; with "a view to preserve or improve, men frequently deteriorate "what they value and admire, either by absurd guards, or "by preposterous refinement."—I. 60.

LECT. I. " laboured with a cool and intelligent calcula-
" tion, to afflict, to corrupt, to destroy the earth,
" have, most often, been cheated in the ultimate
" effect; which has resulted in the re-edification
" of society upon a better plan, in the diffusion
" of knowledge, and in the establishment of secu-
" rities against similar devastations. If we look
" at the beneficial effects of particular benevolent
" designs, it will generally be found that the ho-
" noured agents have been placed, as it were by
" accident, in the midst of their worthy labours,
" without having had the leisure to indulge in
" long-drawn calculations of what they were to
" do. This general principle may even receive
" confirmation from an observation which many
" may have had opportunity to make, namely,
" that men who, all their lives, have been
" alternately elated and tormented by the plan-
" ning of vast designs for the melioration of the
" world, are very rarely the persons actually
" called out of their obscurity by the voice of the
" Divine Providence, to become the prime agents
" in great and happy undertakings. Vastly
" more has been done for the world by men
" who, like Jonah, were urged forward in their
" course against all their intentions, and all their
" predilections, and all their tastes, than by those
" who have been forward to run without a com-
" mission."*

Hence we never err more egregiously than

* Eclectic Review, Vol. XXII. New Series, pp. 4, 5.

when judging as to the early, or even the more matured designs of men, from the results of their history. We see them generally, whether they work for good or for evil, borne onward as by successive billows, and ignorant while rising on the bosom of one wave, as to what will be the form of the next, or whither it will bear them. Facts of this nature need not perplex us in our attempts to ascertain, in a general way, what the causes of the corruptions of Christianity really were ;—but they are facts which clearly suggest that much caution should be exercised in judging of the character and intentions of parties who may have been eminent for the good or evil of their conduct in relation to the church.

Great corruptions of Christianity the effect of general causes.

We have already intimated that the great corruptions of Christianity have not been the effect of partial or trivial causes. Individual effort, and small events, may have become conspicuous among the means which have given prominence to such appearances. But it must be borne in mind, in connexion with all great changes, that the tendency towards them must have been great,—the enterprise of single persons, and unimportant occurrences, becoming usually successful, because descending on a scale which needed only their small weight to make it preponderate. This was the case even with the fathers of the Protestant Reformation, and not less so with the founders of the Holy Inquisition. Both would have laboured in vain, had they not

LECT. I. wrought on the predispositions of their times. It is a common error to suppose that great men give a character to their age. It is more true that every age imparts more or less of its own character to its leading men. Distinguished minds concentrate the spirit of their day; and though as reflected in them it may be a more pure, or a more intense spirit, still, as to its essence, it is the same;—that which has come upon the many, and is sublimated in the few. The mighty influence which has *seemed* to be exerted by such comparatively feeble personages as St. Benedict, and Peter the hermit, is readily understood on this principle, and on no other;—in a word, the corruptions of Christianity have spread far, have taken deep root, and have assumed a most complicated character; and as is the effect, so is its cause, general, deeply laid, and of a working much too intricate to be fully comprehended by man.

Extent and difficulty of the subject.

It will be obvious, from considerations of this nature, that the subject before us is one which may be treated with ease, if treated superficially; but one connected with peculiar difficulties, if viewed in its multifarious combinations, and indefinite extent. It is in intimate relation with nearly every thing in the history of the many tribes and nations who have called themselves Christians. In an attempt to discover the causes of the corruptions of Christianity, our attention must be especially directed toward the cor-

ruption of human nature;—and to judge of human nature adequately and fairly it will be necessary to contemplate it in two important connexions—first, in comparison with the standard of truth and goodness set forth in holy writ; and secondly, in its alliance with all those tendencies and circumstances which have produced the endless modifications presented in its history;—always the same, and yet never the same; in its substance enduring as the heavens, in its form and colouring varied as the clouds. It is a theme, accordingly, which demands that perception and feeling of the beauty and perfectness of genuine Christianity which the merely natural man will fail to possess;—and when this supernatural aid is obtained, there is need of the utmost assistance that learning may supply, and of all that the human mind may bring to the material of knowledge, natural and divine, in the way of imagination, reflection, and judgment. It embraces a review of what no small portion of the human race have really been, morally, mentally, and even physically, and of the numberless influences which have served to make them what they have been. We may be assured, therefore, that the mind least affected with a sense of difficulty on approaching this subject is just the last that would prove equal to its management. Nothing can be further from myself, than a feeling of sufficiency with respect to what is before me. But the topic is connected with inquiries to which I have been

LECT. I. for some time disposed by inclination; and this circumstance has led me to believe, that there is hardly another which I could hope to treat with the same prospect of usefulness.

Importance of the subject.

The importance of this inquiry must be manifest from the fact that Christianity is the matter of a divine revelation, and, as such, ever the same; and from the additional fact, that the nature of man, upon which the history of Christianity has been developed, has been ever the same. Hence it would seem to follow, that whatever *has been* in this connexion, may be expected to return. This, beyond doubt, might be prevented by the Divine interposition. But we find that when it is the will of Providence to meliorate the condition of mankind, it is generally done by means of the wisdom which men have gathered from experience. It is possible, therefore, that the history of error should be made greatly subservient to the interests of truth. It may familiarize the mind with the deceptive forms which error can assume, and by merely depriving it of the advantage of novelty, may do much toward rendering it harmless. The man who can look back to the rise and fate of ancient heresies, will not be much disturbed by the partial resuscitation of them in his own times. He will be aware that things announced as novelties, and broached with the utmost dogmatism and intolerance, are often nothing more than a revival of the extravagancies of some by-gone sect; and their re-

appearance under new names, and somewhat altered circumstances, will be no more surprising to him, than that along with the diseases to which men have always been exposed, there should continue to be some occasional outbreaks of particular maladies. *By their fruits ye shall know them*, is a maxim illustrated and confirmed, on the broadest scale, in the history of the church.

Nor is this the only valuable result that may be anticipated from a studious attention to our present subject. It is well, as a means of self-defence, that we become acquainted with the real origin, and the exact texture, of unsound pretension in religion. But a familiarity, philosophically, historically, and, we must add, devotionally, with the sources of such pretensions, is a most important preliminary, not only with a view to self-preservation, but to the removal of opposing influences. It is this which may be expected to arm the mind of intelligent youth against the insinuations of infidelity when ecclesiastical history becomes the object of study. In the view of a mind thus informed and imbued, the facts which hold so prominent a place in our church histories are no longer monstrous. In vain does the subtlety of the sceptic employ them with a view to undermine his religious hope. He has explored the cause, and is prepared for the effect. By all that is before him, his faith is established, not destroyed. It not only reminds

LECT. I. him of the faithfulness of scripture prophecy, but of the truth of scripture doctrine, demonstrating the depravity of man on a scale which confirms the humiliating lessons of holy writ, and shows, as a consequence, the necessity of those stupendous means of redemption which it is the object of the sacred writers to make known. Christianity should be neither corrupted nor rejected; and my endeavour in these Lectures will be to guard, with an equal solicitude, against the sources of religious error, and those of religious scepticism.

Nor is the man to be envied who while calling himself a Christian is wholly incurious as to the causes which have operated in a remote antiquity, and in later times, to produce the state of things with which he is immediately surrounded. To be thus occupied with what *is*, so as to be unmindful of that which *has* been, and from which the present has proceeded, is assuredly to betray a poverty of imagination, and to be not a little wanting in large and generous sentiment. Such a man is daily conforming to usages, and moving among visible mementos, and employing terms and modes of speech, and cherishing sentiments and habits of thought, all of which have descended to him, as the fruit of a conflict commenced in a far distant age, and perpetuated by the heart and intellect of men, bearing the christian name, through nearly a hundred generations; and though reminded of these facts, and making no attempt to dispute them, he deems them

matters having little claim on his sympathy or his thought! The history of the church, instead of being to him a development of the favourite purposes of heaven, and a ground on which many of his most affecting recollections are awakened, and whence some of his strongest aspirations ascend to the gracious Being who is its head, is much what the mouldering grandeur of ancient Rome has become to the miserable peasants who herd their cattle in its ruins! It is not a small personal loss which happens to the man who is thus negligent *of the works of the Lord, and of the operations of his hand.* It is not possible that he should possess an adequate sense of obligation either to God or man. And that pleasure, that elevation of soul, which is felt when we place ourselves as amid the shades of believers, and confessors, and martyrs, in other ages, and in other lands, must be unknown. Of that better commonwealth, in which all faithful men have a place, it should not be too much for us to say :— *If I forget thee let my right hand forget her cunning; if I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not thee above my chief joy.** The very dust of that desolation which has been allowed, at times, to come upon the church, should be more precious in our eyes than the splendour of empires.

LECT. I.

That the corruptions of Christianity have been injurious to its interests, is but too manifest,

Unphilosophical treatment of this

* Psalm cxxxvii. 5, 6.

LECT. I. subject by the enemies of Christianity.

whether we look to the past or the present. Men who distinguish between other things and their abuses, bring not their wonted fairness and discrimination to the history and circumstances of our holy religion. They do not hold astronomy responsible for the frauds of the astrologer, nor chemistry for the dreams of the alchemist. They admit that a science may be sound in its principles, while many of its votaries are deficient in intelligence; and that a system may be pure, while many who profess it are far from immaculate. But with respect to revealed religion, another rule would seem to have been tacitly agreed upon. Here the fault of the professor is commonly assumed as belonging to the thing professed; and a degenerate community, bearing the christian name, becomes a sort of demonstration against the pretensions of Christianity. Many also, whose sense of justice is not so depraved as to admit that they should become examples of this disingenuousness, are, nevertheless, often influenced by it, and to a degree which they little suspect.

Now we take strong exception to this conduct, and on the obvious ground, that the causes deep-laid in human nature, and inwrought with all the forms of social existence, by which every thing on earth has been made subject to injury, should be expected to operate, in their full force, with regard to Christianity. Among the systems of opinion, or codes of obligation which man has

devised, there is no one that has not been grossly misinterpreted and misapplied, nor that has not been considerably mutilated and mixed up with foreign and contradictory matters,—in other words, *corrupted*. And when the philosopher shall have detected and examined all the causes producing this effect on the systems originating with men, we are prepared to show, that to the whole influence of every one of these Christianity is exposed; and to contend, as a consequence, that nothing can be more at variance with sound philosophy, or with the word of God, than to make that a reason for scepticism in the one of these cases, which is never so admitted in the other. LECT. I.

It should be so plain as not to need repeating, that the misapprehension of a doctrine proves nothing either as to its truth or falsehood. From experience, indeed, and, more especially, from the doctrine of Holy Scripture concerning human depravity, it must be reasonable to anticipate, that whatever approaches nearest to perfection, must be, on that account, most liable to injury from its connexion with human agency. The artist who brings most ability to his pursuit, and whose works exhibit the most practised thought and mechanism, generally needs that his judges should have gone over much of the same ground with himself. The common gaze would overlook nearly every thing to which his more disciplined mind attaches value. It can read but very

LECT. I. partially what he has designed to convey; and will hardly fail to derive impressions from some points not a little foreign from his object. Hence the elevated departments of art are necessarily a thinly peopled region. The crowding and the buzz of the multitude are rarely known there. In a word, it is equally true, in science, in art, and in morals, that the elaborate, the profound, the exquisitely beautiful, are not to be truly appreciated except by a small minority possessing the requisite culture.

It is true, the gospel, considered as a revelation from heaven, must be regarded as commending itself to the *many*. But it is no less true, that it has its adaptation—its intended adaptation, to the *few*. It is designed to communicate its benefits to the rude multitude of our species, and is constructed accordingly. But it is also meant to aid the most sagacious in passing from the earthly to the heavenly. It has its base far-spread over the vale beneath, but its summit reaches to the skies. It is framed to meet the low intelligence of men—even of the mass; but it is ever calling forth the wonder of angels, even of cherubim and seraphim. It is a school of instruction, where the best informed have to become fools if they would be wise; and where the least faulty have to learn that while, supposing themselves rich, increased in goods, and needing nothing, they were poor and blind and miserable and naked. It abounds in the mere elements of

knowledge and of goodness; but it conveys lessons on such matters transcending all that has been taught elsewhere, far as the heavens are above the earth.

If then it be true, that there are no tenets so obvious in themselves, or that can be so clearly stated, as to be secure from gross misconception with the majority of mankind, is it reasonable to expect that the disclosures made to men in the gospel should furnish an exception to this rule? On the contrary, is not Christianity just the last system from which this may be anticipated, since it is emphatically *the* system which, in much of what it contains, is at the greatest remove from the enfeebled perceptions of human nature, and most at issue with its prevailing inclinations? Must not every degree of its excellence be a multiplication of its hazards, as exposed to that rude treatment which must be attendant on its contact with man in his present fallen condition?*

If we look to any department of human learning, not excepting the most abstract sciences,

* "We say the gospel narratives must be real," observes Dr. Hey, "because no one could invent such incidents, "manners, sentiments, and expressions, as we find in them. "The Evangelists, at least, were not improved enough to "do it, in morality or philology. If this be a real argu- "ment, it is one which will appear the more clearly, the "more we improve in these particulars. If as men improve, "the gospels continue to seem to contain good morality, "the evidence of their excellence must be acknowledged "to increase, because every improvement in the judges of

LECT. I. we find them all liable, in their turn, to the changes which the word *corruption* is used to denote. A patient observer of human nature, especially as exhibited in national character, has described the effect of Mohammedism on the sciences cultivated by its disciples during the middle ages, in terms directly illustrating the important point on which we are now bestowing a passing notice. "When success permitted the "Mahometan monarchs to repose a little from "their warlike labours," says Mr. Chenenix, "they turned their thoughts to the arts and "sciences, and the works of Grecian literature "were translated. The first attempts were made "under Al Mansor, who was prompted by a "desire to introduce the Grecian practice of "physic. His efforts were seconded by suc- "ceeding caliphs; and Galen, Aristotle, Euclid, "Ptolemy, Hippocrates, and others, became "known in the empire of Islamism. A long list "of names might be selected from among the "celebrated Saracens of that epocha, as Al "Kendi, Al Farabi, Al Ashari, Avicenna, &c., "and most of all Averroes, who was compared "to Aristotle himself. It is remarkable that "all these men were physicians, no less than "philosophers; in such high repute was the

"this matter, must put the writings judged to a new trial."—Lectures, B. I. c. xiii. It is from ignorance and vice that Christianity has suffered its many wrongs. Its appeal is to intelligence and purity, and where these are judges its cause is secure.

" study of medicine in Mahometan countries. " Yet this art was sadly turned aside from what " it was in the writings of Galen and Hippo- " crates. The Mahometans, instead of pursuing " the path of observation and experience, gave " themselves up to disquisitions; but the moment " they deserted their Grecian models, they fell " into the grossest quackery, mixed up with " astrology and uroscopy. Chemistry was in- " debted to them for the discovery of many " pharmaceutic preparations, and for considerable " improvements in the art of conducting opera- " tions. But these advantages came mixed with " so many alchemical extravagancies and mys- " teries, that much of the obligation which " modern science otherwise would have to them " is lost. Astronomy is also indebted to them " for many improvements; but the science was " disfigured by astrology as much as it was " improved by observation. The mathematics " were cultivated by them, yet the doctrines of " the Greeks were more frequently corrupted " than improved. Many of their sages pretended " that they could interpret the language of birds; " while others imposed upon the vulgar with rela- " tions of supernatural visions, obtained by fasting " and prayer; and distributed their charms and " amulets among their dupes. In metaphysics, " if so it can be called, they reasoned with " subtlety, according to the mode of the Peripa- " tetics, but framed a system so mystical as to be

LECT. I. "incomprehensible."* Thus was science, even the purest departments of it, corrupted under the rule of Mohammedism; and no man stumbles at the fact.

But it will perhaps be said, that our reasoning thus from the the fate of other things to the fate of Christianity, might be admitted, if men were allowed to regard Christianity as a matter of merely human origin, exposed, in common with matters for which nothing supernatural is claimed, to the ordinary influence of events and circumstances. In this case, it may be said, it ought not to occasion surprise if the corruptions of Christianity should be of marked variety and extent, seeing that it presents a wider and more refined range of things to be affected by the ignorance, the presumption, and the depravity of mankind. But in behalf of Christianity, the character of a divine revelation is claimed, and a divine influence is said to be vouchsafed for its special preservation.

Now the distinction thus made we of course admit; but we strongly demur to the conclusion which seems to be very frequently deduced from it. Divine influence may *add* much to human responsibility, but can never have been intended to destroy, or even to impair it. This influence, we believe, is only so far conferred, as is needful to the placing of man in that new state of probation which is introduced by the gospel. It will not

* An Essay upon National Character, I. 381—383.

fail of success, to the extent of the promises relating to it. But concerning those promises, we must insist that they are perfectly reconcilable with the too partial effect of Christianity in the world, and with the evident feebleness of its agency in the heart of many among its avowed, and even its genuine disciples. Christianity leaves both nations and individuals subject to all those tendencies and usages by which they would otherwise have been influenced :—and while proposing to enlighten and renovate those who embrace its message, it is far from warranting astonishment at the fact, that the many reject it, and that among those who assume its name, while some are altogether alien from its spirit, even the best are but partially governed by it.*

The question of the Corruptions of Christianity one of degree only.

It will hardly be said, that if a revelation be made to man, it ought to be secured from the least taint of corruption in every point But if

* Cyprian was not aware that any great degree of philosophy was necessary to understand such appearances. "Inimicus videns ille idola derelicta, et per nimium credentium "populum sedes suas ac templa deserta, excogitaverit novam "fraudem, ut sub ipso Christiani nominis titulo fallat incautos? "Hæreses invenit et schismata, quibus subverteret fidem, veri- "tatem corrumperet, scinderet unitatem. Quos detinere non "potest in viæ veteris cæcitate, circumscribit et decipit novi "itineris errore. Rapit de ipsa Ecclesia homines, et dum sibi "appropinquasse jam lumini, atque evasisse seculi noctem "videntur, alias nescientibus tenebras rursus infundit; ut cum "Evangelio Christi, et cum observatione ejus, et lege non "stantes, Christianos se vocent, et ambulantes in tenebris, "habere se lumen existiment."—De Unitate Ecclesia. Opera. Ed. Oxon, p. 105.

LECT. I. the existence of such corruption at all be conceded as reasonable, who shall determine the line beyond which it must become otherwise than reasonable? The whole question, therefore, is one of *degree* merely; and, as such, must have its place among the secret things which belong to God.

Tendencies in the conduct of the Understanding leading to the Corruption of Christianity.

It will be perceived, that the observations we have hitherto made, are not so much preliminary to the present Lecture, as to our whole subject. But we must now proceed to notice, more specifically, certain tendencies in the present condition of human nature, from which a various and extended corruption of Christianity was to have been anticipated. These tendencies we shall perhaps do well to notice as constituting three classes: first, we have those which relate more immediately to the Conduct of the Understanding; secondly, those which belong to some peculiarities of Natural Temperament; and lastly, those connected with the present state of the Appetites and Passions. It may be, that these tendencies ever act more or less together, and exert an immediate influence upon each other. But on this subject, we shall the more readily comprehend the whole, if we give as much distinctness as possible to the parts.

Indolence.

I. 1. One of the principal causes of the corruption of Christianity, connected immediately with the understanding, is INDOLENCE.

The only remedy against error, in any path of

inquiry, is a diligent search after truth; and it is not a small number who have failed to discover the truth, more from the want of appropriate exertion, than from any other cause. Every one must be aware that the moral faculties exert so powerful an influence over the understanding, that the most comprehensive and laborious intellect, if perverted by the suggestions of depravity, will miss its way. But we are still safe in affirming, that an incalculable amount of the error which has obtained in the world, has resulted purely from the general sluggishness of the human mind. One who knew what was in man, assures us, that, with the great majority, the rational faculties would seem to be possessed for no higher end than to assist them in determining what they should eat, what they should drink, and wherewithal they should be clothed. And this class, so numerous in the days of the Son of Man, continues to exist, and, unhappily, in nearly the same proportion. The reason, the memory, the imagination, all have their exercise; but it is within a very narrow circle, as the slaves of the seen and temporal, and of such things, very commonly, in their smallest and meanest shapes. To become listeners only, in order to be wise, would require, in some instances, a painful measure of restraint; to become readers for that purpose, would be still more difficult; but gravely to inquire, to reason, and reflect—alas! this would be to exist anew, to become the

LECT. I. opposite of themselves. Where such habits are found, error, on all subjects, is, more or less, inevitable. We cannot regard Christianity as entrusted to this slothful guardianship, without at once perceiving that the portion of it retained must be little, compared with the accumulated misconceptions with which, as a whole, it will be disfigured and overlaid. That the nominal Christianity of the large class to which we now refer, should have been so widely different from the Christianity of the New Testament, is really not so much surprising, as that such minds should have been found among the professors of such a system in any form.

It is not necessary that we should be able to say how small a portion of effort, or of knowledge, may be sufficient to salvation, in the case of persons who are placed in circumstances unfavourable to habits of inquiry. The fact is plainly before us—that the indolence of the human mind, the source of so much error on all other matters, is the prolific parent of corruption with regard to Christianity. We do not say that men must possess the studious habits of philosophers, in order to be Christians. But it is demanded imperatively that men should *seek*, if they would find; and that they should *learn* of Jesus, if they would be saved by him. To this duty, however, the sloth of the human understanding is so directly opposed, as to lead, in some instances, to a total rejection of the

gospel; and, more frequently, to the adoption of false views concerning it. We presume that persons who would obtain the slightest acquaintance with the laws of nature, must do more than breathe the air, or glance upon the heavens; but unless an effort scarcely more considerable might suffice to render the majority of our species wise unto salvation, there has been little prospect, if left to themselves, of their ever becoming thus wise—so inert have been their faculties with regard to every thing intellectual, and especially with regard to every thing religious.

Here, then, is an ample source of encouragement to the labours of the artful, should it be judged well to degrade religion into means of gratifying the base passions which it was designed to subdue. This one fact belonging to the present state of the human mind, is enough to render it probable that there should be scarcely any speculation so strange, or any practice so frivolous or perverse, as not to be easily imposed on multitudes as a part of Christianity. Where ignorance prevails, so that the objects of the religious sympathies are imperfectly known, the evils to be apprehended from them will partake of a fearful indefiniteness; "and when real objects of terror are "wanting, the soul, active to its own prejudice, "and fostering its predominant inclination, finds "imaginary ones, to whose power and malevolence "it sets no limits. As these enemies are entirely "invisible and unknown, the methods taken to

LECT. I. " appease them are equally unaccountable, and " consist in ceremonies, observances, mortifica- " tions, sacrifices, presents, or in any practice, " however absurd and frivolous, which either " folly or knavery recommends to a blind cre- " dulity."* All these evils may be expected to follow among a people professing Christianity, as among the heathen, according to the degree in which indolence is allowed to become the parent of false views concerning the Deity.

Credulity. 2. We may notice, accordingly, in the next place, that with this proneness to slumber and

* Hume's Essays. Of Superstition. Plutarch's picture of the superstitious man, drawn evidently from the life, affords a striking illustration and confirmation of the text. " ' Leave " me,' cries the unhappy being,—' let me, godless and cursed, " and hated by all the gods, let me suffer my punishment :'— " he sits without, covered with sackcloth or with filthy rags, " and often roots and wallows in the mire, and remembers " this or that sin ;—he has eaten or drunk such and such " things, or he has gone such a road, from which some divine " authority had excluded him. With him the festive days in " honour of the gods are not days of hilarity, but of fear and " horror. The persecuted find temples and altars a refuge ; " but where others lose their fears the superstitious tremble " the most. In his sleep, as well as in his waking hours, the " phantoms which his false alarm has created, still haunt him : " his reasoning has the incoherency of a dream, and his fears " know no repose—the spectres that alarm him are ever in " his way." " Ignorance of duty and of religion," says the same writer, " has diverged into different channels. When " passing through harsh and bold minds, as through an un- " yielding soil, it has produced impiety ; and flowing over " minds of a more yielding temperament, as a stream meeting " with a softer mould, it has proved the parent of super- " stition."—De Superstitione.

inaction, CREDULITY is intimately connected; and to this cause we have to attribute much of the corruption by which Christianity has been dishonoured.

There are feelings and reflections from which no man is wholly free, the tendency of which is to make religion, of some kind, an almost necessary adjunct of our being. Hence, the choice of man, in this respect, is not so much between the true religion and no religion, as between the true religion and the false. The objects of his faith may be few or many, good or evil, and his manner of doing homage to them may be almost infinitely varied; but a faith in the supernatural of some kind, though it be nothing better than the supernatural of witchcraft, would appear to be unavoidable, The wretched superstition which sometimes shakes the heart of the Laplander, or the peasant, may not seem to deserve the name of a *faith;* but we so advert to it, simply because, base as it is, it serves, in some measure, to call forth our religious capabilities, though in a false direction. It shows the tenacity with which human nature clings to the existence of the supernatural, by exhibiting it as even creating the imaginary, when it has lost its hold upon the real.

Here we have a tendency in the human mind that *will* have its *object*. The question occurring is—What is the nature of the object on which it is likely to fix itself? To this inquiry but one

LECT. I. answer can be given. Mental sloth is necessarily connected with ignorance and unskilfulness, leaving men unpractised in all those exercises by which evidence and truth require to be examined. To believe on proper evidence is the obligation of reason: to believe without it is the work of credulity. And so long as the state of human nature shall be what it is; and so long as it shall be a fact, that to reason requires exertion, while to be credulous we have only to yield to the current of circumstances and impressions—the victims of credulity will greatly outnumber the offspring of intelligence. To ascertain the faith of the credulous, it will generally be sufficient to be aware of what is most accredited in their social connexions; most in agreement with their untaught perceptions, or with their particular tastes and temperament;—the truth of the object being generally inferred from the strength of the mere impression made by it; the passions and appetites becoming the parent of the creed.

The evils which must be attendant on this state of mind, are too many to be enumerated, too formidable to be described. It is not only as a slumber falling on the garrison, but as a false persuasion of safety; and by such as lie in wait to deceive, must ever be regarded as presenting a full license to do evil. Hence, the ease with which so many depredations have been committed in the temple of God, and so many base substitutions have been practised

there,—the suspicion and wakefulness that would have detected the workers of iniquity have been wanting.

It is no doubt true, that there are limits within which credulity *must* be exercised by the majority of mankind, and where, in consequence, its exercise may be neither unreasonable nor injurious.* But men have learned to extend the implicit reliance due to much which a properly attested revelation may contain, to other matters resting on the frail sanction of mortals; and by this easy process have allowed the creations of human policy or weakness to obscure and supersede the communications of their Maker. In the New Testament, though treating of subjects possessing a transcendent greatness and abstraction, there is nothing to encourage that unreasoning state of mind which surrenders the imagination and the feelings as a domain for the fictions of credulity. Every mind accustomed to reflection, must have observed the striking contrast between the wonderful discoveries made in the gospels, and those human inventions which were meant to resemble them, and which we find blended with Christianity in subsequent ages. There is a simple grandeur — a character of nature and probability, attending the former, which are almost invariably wanting in the latter.

* Celsus accused the Christians of receiving their doctrine on the authority of their teachers. No man could meet this charge more wisely than Origen has done.—Opera, I. 327—330. Ed. Benedict.

LECT. I. What the Scriptures reveal, for example, concerning the future allotments of mankind, is placed in that partial light — left amid those generalities and shadows, which enlightened reason would anticipate in the disclosures made to beings in one state, with respect to another greatly different from their own. The many notices which occur with respect to miraculous agency, all partake of the same chastened and natural sobriety. Compare these portions of the New Testament with the descriptions of invisible things, and the narratives of the miraculous, supplied by the taste of Mohammed, and of the clergy in the middle ages; and, though designed to be counterparts, what have they in common? It is the opposition of wisdom to folly, of the spiritual to the sensual, of an order of things which would imbue the earthly with the heavenly, to another which would bring down the heavenly to the level of the earthly. It is not a small thing to be content with the language of simplicity. As a matter of taste only, it is generally the last of our attainments. In all cases, it seems to require great confidence either of power or of truth. The confidence of the Evangelists could only be of the latter kind, and it taught them to clothe the sublimest facts ever recorded in the simplest expressions:— treating of the spiritual and the infinite in a style and manner eminently adapted to check the license of the imagination and of the

passions, and to render the faith of the believer a service at once reasonable and holy.

But after all the sacred writers have done in these respects, that easy credence with regard to the supernatural, which, within certain limits, had ever been so observable in human nature, is far from being corrected. The fact that the statute books of all the nations of Christendom should have been crowded with the most sanguinary laws against the imaginary crime of witchcraft; and that even in lands where the full light of Protestantism had shone for more than two centuries, numbers of unhappy creatures might be seen tortured and destroyed together, as charged with this offence,—is enough to indicate the diversity and the extravagance of those corruptions of Christianity which must every where have flown from this source.

It may be true that there is often much of what is amiable in the feeling by which the credulous are led into their most erroneous conclusions. They find it less difficult to suppose, that things which have not the best appearance of truth, should be true, than to conclude that a large number of apparently good men have been in serious error in relation to them. Even the most marvellous relations have no doubt been frequently credited rather than believe that men could be guilty of the daring impiety which must have been involved in the fabrication of them. Circumstances of this nature, however, while

LECT. I. they may lessen the culpability of the credulous, do not at all affect our conclusion, that credulity has been a prolific parent of corruption to Christianity.

It might not have been irrelevant to have shown that credulity is not unfrequently allied with superior intelligence. We may have seen it developed in such connexions, so as to have placed the weight of no ordinary learning and genius on the side of the most deteriorated forms of Christianity; and sometimes allied with a scepticism not to be removed by the evidence of Revelation. But in such cases the result is not to be ascribed to credulity so much as to other causes, and those chiefly of a moral nature. It is with the many, untaught and unreflecting, that this tendency operates most separately and forcibly, and to the more manifest injury of the gospel.*

Prejudice. 3. But if there be a tendency to Credulity prevalent in men, so is there an aversion to

* The following passage presents a strong generalized view of this potent cause of error. "It is not sixty years since "persons of talent and research in both parts of the kingdom, "composed and published, to the great edification of the "world, learned and elaborate dissertations to prove, that "Mary Queen of Scots was innocent of the murder of her "husband. Even in cases where the greatest calmness and "deliberation might be expected, and among those whose "profession it is to investigate truth, the ambition of "founding a sect, or displaying intellectual superiority,—the "veneration for great names, or long-established opinions,— "and the anxiety to penetrate into the mysteries of nature— "have sometimes produced, not modest and patient inquirers, "but zealous preachers, and zealous believers of the most

change,—a certain dread of the untried, which is ever operating as a check upon it; and pushed, as it frequently is, to excess, it assumes the forms of prejudice, bigotry, and even sanguinary intolerance. Of PREJUDICE, then, as a further cause of the corruption of Christianity, we may say, as of Credulity, that it is the effect, in a large degree, of ignorance, and is fashioned into its innumerable shapes by inclinations and circumstances. But, speaking generally, we may remark, that while it is the fault of credulity to believe without due testimony, it is the fault of prejudice to be satisfied with it when defective, or falsely presented. We seldom regard credulity as having much relation to inquiry, but prejudice may subsist along with it to a large extent. To *pre*-judge, is not to forego the act of judging; but to be deficient as to a fair and adequate use of the means

" fanciful creeds of philosophy,—about the crystalline spheres; " about the influences of the stars; about the whirlpools that " guide the planets in their course; about the more modern " systems of baropeotic, magnetic, and electric fluids; about " the nosological humours, hot, cold, and even dry; about " the animal spirits; about the good genius Archæus; about " the *very quick and powerful mobile substance* which has " lately been announced to be life itself, and if not *homo-* " *ousian*, at least *homoi-ousian* with electricity and gal- " vanism;—with many other articles of faith equally orthodox " and reasonable."—Edinburgh Review, XXIV. 454. Some twenty years have passed since the above was written, but the works of the philosophical and the learned continue to abound with such proofs of wisdom. That *religion* should not suffer, and suffer greatly from this influence, would require the constant intervention of miracle.

LECT. I. necessary to render our conclusions agreeable to truth. Hence, it is a defect belonging in no small degree to every human intellect. We say nothing just now, as to the causes of this bias in the working of the human mind. It must be sufficient to advert to it as a fact, and to the manner in which, from its prevalence and power, it must necessarily affect whatever belongs to Christianity.

What more is the religious faith of the greater part of mankind, than the manifest result of prejudice? Nor can we ascribe the faith of the majority in Christendom to any more honourable source. And the causes which render it so much a question of mere circumstances, whether men are found professors of Mohammedanism or of Christianity, extend their influence to all the diversities of sentiment and usage which nominal Christianity presents—leaving it probable that the men who become zealous Protestants in one connexion, would, speaking generally, have been zealous Papists in another. In a word, a theme more extended, consisting of more parts, or of a more complex intermixture of parts, than is presented to us in the operations of prejudice, cannot well be imagined. The causes which contribute to its existence, and influence its direction, are innumerable. As is the feebleness which now characterises the human mind, especially in relation to all moral and religious excellence, so must be the war between prejudice and

reason, on all subjects, and especially with regard to Christianity. The extent of this general faultiness in human nature, is what must determine how far it is probable that the principles of a pure religion will become mixed up with matter which can only tend to deprave them. The earlier advocates of Christianity often lament the difficulties which beset them from the force of prejudice, both among the learned and the ignorant, describing it as leading in many instances to a rejection of the whole claim of the gospel, and frequently to an adoption of it in a form not a little corrupt.

But Origen, who is remarkable for the frequency and strength of his invectives on this subject, was not always sufficiently aware, that in too violent an escape from prejudice, there is danger of falling on presumption.* There are minds which may not be described as indolent, and which it must be admitted are only partially influenced by credulity or prejudice, but which

* " Quippe hanc vim habent contentionis amor et præconcepta opinio, ut, qui iis assueti sunt, ii rebus etiam perspicuis refragentur potuis, quam opiniones ponant quibus eorum anima imbuta est. Ac multo facilius de aliis rebus consuetudines reliquerit quispiam, quamvis ab illis difficile admodum avellatur, quam quæ ad dogmata pertinent. Nec tamen illas alias, ubi semel inoleverint, facile excutiat. Unde vix adduci possunt homines, ut aut domos, aut urbes, aut vicos, aut homines deserant, quibus cum junxere consuetudinem. Hoc igitur in causa fuit, cur è Judæis etiam multi vaticiniorum, ac miraculorum quæ Jesus fecit, evidentiæ resisterent, nec circumstantiis percellerentur eorum quæ eum perpessum esse scriptum est. Hic autem

LECT. I. nevertheless have their besetting vices in another shape. Their activity is apparent; and it would not seem to be their manner to believe without evidence, or to conclude that what has been generally received, must, on that account, be worthy of continued acceptation. On the contrary, it is matter of much lamentation with these persons that men should be found capable of grovelling thus on the verge of mere instinct, yielding themselves to the power of every delusive opinion and impression, and as to themselves they are resolved that no such degrading thraldom shall ever hold them. But, unhappily, while professing to be influenced simply by the desire of rational conviction—these less passive spirits become the victims of a tendency, which, though widely different from what has so deeply offended them, is equally dangerous; and one that we cannot perhaps better designate than, as we have done—by the word PRESUMPTION—meaning thereby, a disposition to renounce established opinions, and to indulge in novel speculations, without necessity, and without due reverence and consideration.

4. With respect to the causes producing this mental bias we say little at present, though considered abstractedly, scarcely any thing can appear

" affectibus obnoxiam esse humanam naturam, evidens fiet " cogitanti, quam difficile ab iis quæ sibi à parentibus con- " civibusque tradita fuerunt, avellantur qui semel iis fuerunt " occupati, quamlibet erubescenda et stulta sint."—Opera, I. 367, 368. Vide 327—329, 332–336, 349—351.

more capricious than its movements. We all know that opinions which seem not to be the offspring of hereditary credulity or prejudice may chance to be as little sustained by reason, as are the follies which they are meant to displace. A contempt of vulgar error is not sufficient guide to truth. There may be a prejudice *against* what is generally received, not at all more reasonable than the common prepossessions in its favour. It will not, of course, be said, in so many words, that where much is wrong all must be wrong;—or that because the many believe without adequate testimony, the few should not be expected to believe at all. It would be going too far to say directly, that inasmuch as hereditary and commonly received opinions are frequently erroneous, they should in no instance be acknowledged. Nevertheless, we often see a willingness in men to be carried into extremes of this nature; the language of their passions, if not of their reason, being nearly to the effect of that we have now employed. When the mind becomes subject to a strong revulsion on such points, the labour of love is to destroy; and small is the energy or the skill which is brought to the business of construction, compared with what is applied to the work of demolition. It is a disposition, certainly, very unlike the quiescent spirit which has allowed the errors of ages and generations to transmigrate with so little interruption. But it does not follow from this

LECT. I. circumstance that it should be altogether commendable. It may be well to pluck out the tares, but it is not well that the wheat also should perish. It may be important to annihilate error, but it is no less important to be in possession of the truth which should occupy its place. Neglecting this precaution, we may only have created a void, to see it suddenly filled with some other, and, it may be, a more injurious kind of delusion. When men have cast away their sloth and their easy credence in hereditary notions, the dangers which beset them in pursuit of truth are rather changed than removed; for then especially comes the need of modesty, caution, and an intimate acquaintance with the limits of human reason, and with the nature of the multiplied objects with which it will have to do. The man who presumes upon his own sufficiency when placed in these novel circumstances is bold only from an insensibility to danger. The history of the human mind shows abundantly that the wise have their follies in common with the unwise; and that men may boast much of being governed by reason alone, while among the many causes which lead to the formation of their sentiments reason holds but a very humble place.

Thus the new is often introduced by means as little reputable as were those which served to the preservation of the old. And it is worthy of remark, that all parties agree in imputing this spirit of presumptuous innovation and dogmatism

to their opponents, and thus confess its prevalence. Nor is there a department in science, in the arts, or in literature, where it might not be shown to have wrought its peculiar mischief. It is the lawless aggression of the heedless and the vain—this it is even when connected, as is sometimes the case, with much that is venerable in learning, and with more that is splendid in genius.

What we have now said concerning a tendency toward the presumptuous, refers to it as relating to matters having no necessary connexion with religion. But if we find in all other things, that the matters to which credulity and prejudice attach a kind of sanctity, are ever liable to be assailed, and that the assault directed against them is often as little reasonable in its spirit, and as injurious in its effects, as was the passive temper which so long submitted to them;—where, we must ask, is the room for wonder, if Christianity, also, be found to suffer much from this cause? It must be evident, on a little reflection, that whatever damage has resulted elsewhere from a spirit of presumption, may be expected to occur in this connexion in a still greater measure. In the pages of holy writ, every such man is accosted in language little soothing to the spirit which rules in him. Here,—the things he is required to believe, the manner in which they are taught, the evidence by which they are attested, and the consequences attendant on rejecting them, all furnish

LECT. I. an abundant opportunity to the working of the sin by which he is so readily beset. Here he is called upon to deny himself the most, and here, as self-willed and presumptuous, he will be found an offender the most.

The history of the Church, especially of the eastern division of it, might be largely appealed to as showing the multitude and the monstrousness of the errors that may have their source in this spirit.* Neither have we need to pass from our own age, nor from our own neighbourhood, for striking and melancholy illustrations of this nature. Men are still found who can presume to discard the whole of that evidence which God has connected with his message of mercy to our race. And even where the authority of holy Scripture is admitted, how often is every thing that could make it important to a fallen world daringly expunged?† Nor is it unusual to find

* I refer here to the subtleties connected with the Arian, the Tritheistic, and Sabellian controversies, and to those, no less numerous and incomprehensible, that were engrafted on the doctrine of the Incarnation. Not content with defending these doctrines as facts, the metaphysical forms in which it was attempted to explain them were the matter of fierce discussion, and the occasion of relentless persecution—all parties more or less forgetting that they were affecting to be wise above what is written, and extending their unbidden curiosity to matters which must ever be too high for created intelligence.

† "Faustus Socinus, and his immediate associates, were "distinguished among other obliquities, for their attempts to "infringe upon even the natural perfections of God. They "denied that the essence of the Supreme Being is immense,

the theory of christian doctrine maintained, but maintained in a manner which not merely neutralizes its holy influence, but renders it in some instances the servant of iniquity, in others

" or his presence infinite; regarding the Omnipresence of " the Deity as only an energy or influence, exerted or " retracted as occasion served." (F. Socini Opera, tom. I. p. 685.) " They regarded the eternity of God as an ever- " growing time, so that the Deity is become older, and " regards past and future spaces of duration as remote objects " of perception, in the same way, though in a much nobler " degree, that finite minds are obliged to do." (Ibid. tom. I. p. 545.) Crellius (whose sentiments on the Divine attributes are in many respects superior to those of his associates) de Deo et ejus Attrib. cap. xviii. p. 44. Ed. 1656.) " They " maintained that God possesses not infinite knowledge; " that he cannot have a determinate and certain acquaintance " with future events, more especially with the future actions " of intelligent beings (Ibid. pp. 543—549); and that he " changes his mind, alters his purposes, and adapts his mea- " sures to rising circumstances." (Crellius de Deo et ejus Attrib. cap. xxxii. p. 113.) " They affirmed that in the " Divine will there are passions and commotions of less or " greater violence; such as wishing, hope, and gratification " at gaining a purpose; or suspense, anxiety, fear, disap- " pointment, regret, and grief; but to escape the conclusion " that these notions are destructive of the perfect blessedness " of the Deity, they observed, that besides his internal sources " of pleasure and delight, the number of external occurrences, " which are gratifying to the Divine mind so incomparably " exceeds that of unwelcome and disappointing events, as " greatly to diminish, if they do not quite expunge, all sense " of unhappiness." (Ibid. cap. xxxi, pp. 106, 107.)—Dr. Smith's Scripture Testimony to the Messiah, I. 141, 142. Second Ed. Reader! pause on what is thus before you, and say whether the authors of the Athanasian and Nicene Creeds were not wisely instructed as to the proper office of the human understanding in matters of religion, compared with men who could write thus impiously?

LECT. I. the instrument of a worldly indulgence or ambition.

These brief remarks must suffice in relation to those tendencies of the Understanding, which have conduced in the greatest degree to the corruption of Christianity. How far these are innate with the human mind, or how far they are the product of circumstances, is not now important to determine. Certain natural and moral causes, which undoubtedly have a powerful influence upon this conduct of the intellectual faculties, will claim our attention in the next Lecture. All we have now done has been to exhibit these tendencies as facts, as so many fixed phenomena in the present state of the human mind. Come whence they may, their appearance, to a large extent, has all the certainty of a law of nature; and their influence with regard to every thing intellectual, and especially with regard to every thing christian, must be generally pernicious. Accordingly there is enough in them, even when considered alone, to force upon every reasonable mind the unwelcome anticipation, that the history of Christianity, like the history of every thing else, in proportion to its goodness, will be to no small extent the history of its corruptions. "*Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? for the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein.*"

LECTURE II.

ON THE CORRUPTION OF CHRISTIANITY FROM TENDENCIES IN THE PRESENT CONDITION OF HUMAN NATURE.

LECTURE II.

HOSEA XIV. 9.

"*Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? for the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein.*"

In the preceding Lecture, your attention was called to some preliminary observations designed to show something of the nature and extent of the subject to be treated in this series of discourses. We have proposed to consider the corruptions of Christianity, in the first place, as resulting from tendencies in the present condition of human nature, before attempting to ascertain the amount, or the precise character, of the injuries which it has sustained from the systems, whether of philosophy or religion, which have obtained in the world. Among the tendencies in the conduct of the Understanding from which Christianity has received material wrong, we have noticed Sluggishness, Credulity, Prejudice, and Presumption. We have further remarked,

LECT. II.

that there are causes, arising, partly from Natural Temperament, and partly from the state of the Appetites and Passions, which exert a powerful influence on the character of the understanding, and it is the natural effect of these causes, with respect to human reason, and with respect to Christianity, generally viewed, that will form the subject of the present Lecture.

Peculiarities of individual character only partially affected by religion.

It is obvious that some minds possess an exuberance of imagination, while in others, that faculty appears to be almost wholly wanting. There are natures, the sensibilities of which are of the most susceptible description; and there are those which evince a hardness almost invulnerable. Some also there are who are animated with a constant flow of health, while others are seen long drooping with disease. Now, we may conceive of these, and of similar differences, as the effect of purely natural causes, leaving the several classes so distinguished from each other, free, as far as these particulars are concerned, from either praise or blame. But we can hardly conceive that the Christianity of all these classes will be of precisely the same complexion.

The inspired writers themselves no exception to this rule.

If the church has her "sons of consolation," and her "sons of thunder," these varieties must be sought, not so much in the grace which makes us differ from the unbelieving, as in the natural character which has previously distinguished us from each other. For as the gospel does not propose to bestow new faculties on men, but

rather to give a just exercise to those we possess as common to our nature; neither does it affect the shades of previous character so as to remove them, but makes them tributary to the Divine glory, by directing them to their proper objects. Accordingly, what was peculiar to Barnabas or Boanerges, to the beloved disciple or the apostle of the Gentiles, *before* conversion, continued to be, in a great degree, peculiar to them. Thus it has pleased the only wise God to *engraft*, if we may so speak, on the differences of natural character, rather than to prune them wholly away. It may be, that something is of necessity lost by this process; but we may venture to observe, that by this means not a little of the beautiful variousness of nature is preserved in the kingdom of grace; and that a diversified fitness to do good is kept up, adapted to the different kinds of necessity in the state of the church and the world. It would also be easy to demonstrate, that what is thus true of men, who were alike Christians, and even of Apostles, who were alike inspired teachers, is equally true of the ancient prophets. The impassioned thought of David, the profound observation of Solomon, the transcendant imagination of Isaiah, the tender sensibility of Jeremiah, the homely fidelity of Amos, and the courtly elevation of Daniel,—all are features of individual character, which even the gift of inspiration did not so affect as to preclude them from their writings. Hence, the

LECT. II. sacred Scriptures, while conveying but one theme, present that theme in a form as varied as was the texture of nature and habit in the persons who were called to place it upon record: in other words, as varied as was needful, that it might be mercifully adjusted, in a great measure, not only to the wants of men, but even to their taste. Every false suggestion was excluded from the mind of the sacred writers by the impulse of the Divine Spirit; and all the aids of memory or illumination for which miraculous influence was required, were miraculously bestowed. Their authority is perfect, their very task seeming to have been, in some instances, a dictate of inspiration. But, in general, they write as they were used to speak and act, each in his proper character.

Nor should we, perhaps, be going too far were we to say, that the cause now under consideration was allowed to operate even beyond the peculiarities which belong only to modes of communication. While the christian redemption as viewed by the several authors of the apostolic epistles, was, in all its main features the same, it is not easy to suppose, after careful comparison of their writings, that the points in it which were most prominent in the eye of any one of them, were precisely those which occupied the same relative position in the view of the rest. There are certain truths of religion which possess an unusual, and we should

perhaps say, an undue attractiveness, at particular seasons, according to the then state of the mind. And as it is with the feeling which is peculiar to seasons, so it is with the feeling which is peculiar to character. The same system may have certain aspects especially interesting to minds of one complexion; and others which will obtain the same kind of precedence with minds somewhat differently constituted. The mind of the Apostle of the Gentiles differed in its natural temperament, and in its acquired tendencies, from that of his brethren; and to this fact appears, not only in his manner of writing, but in his relative treatment of the things introduced. And if it be true that the elements of natural character are suffered to operate, and to this extent, with respect to christianity, even in inspired men, we should naturally expect to find strong admixtures from this source in the systems adopted as christian, by more fallible mortals like ourselves.

LECT. II.

1. Let us advert, then, in illustration of this part of the subject, to minds in which there is an

EXCESS OF IMAGINATION.

Such may be the case, either from the unusual strength of this particular faculty, or from the weakness of others to which it should be subject. Wherever it is ascendant, it is in disproportion—in excess. We all know that it is capable of exercising a kind of sovereignty over the things with which its influence is connected;

Corruption of Christianity from an Excess of Imagination.

LECT. II. and that having selected its objects from the present and the future, it can dispose of them with a skill, and vest them with a shadowy impressiveness, greatly exceeding any thing that simple memory or reason could supply. On the wintry day, it can call up the delights of the spring time, the beauty of summer, and the joy of harvest. It can restore to age the vigour of by-gone years, and even the dream of youth,—throwing over the evening path, as with a magic power, the rays of cheerfulness and hope.

But the ease with which the imagination can create its visions, has rendered it a dangerous guide. It is too often the minister of our pleasures to be trusted as the minister of truth; and, in fact, has deceived us much too frequently to be deserving of confidence. When its strength is put forth, it never fails to clothe the objects of our wishes with an unreal attractiveness—with much of that mere fantasy, which dies away as distance is diminished. While subject to the mastery of the understanding, the aids of this faculty are invaluable; but according to its dominance must be the dominance of shadows in the place of realities, of error in the place of truth.

Few things, however, are more common than this obtrusive influence of the imagination. In youth, and in the uncultivated mind generally, it may be said to be, with only occasional exceptions, the ruling power. And even where the

culture of the understanding has been considerable, it may not have been such as to keep this faculty in a fitting subjection. Thus it was among the ancient Greeks. The religion of that memorable people was the offspring mainly of a prolific imagination. Its variety of objects, its dramatic spirit, its ever-returning and often beautiful pageantry—all may be compared to a veil of exquisite workmanship, so wrought, and so disposed, as to exclude alike the gloom of scepticism and the light of truth. And when opposed to the discovery of spiritual things made in the gospel, how many were the fascinations with which a system, all fiction in itself, and deeply pernicious in most of its tendencies, was found to be encircled; and how potent was its influence on the mind of its votaries! Appeals were constantly made to it as the religion of ancestors, even from remote generations; as inwrought with all the greatness of national history, and as having been associated with all those achievements of genius which had raised the states of Greece to a supremacy unrivalled and unfading. LECT. II.

All this, as far as it respected the *religion* adverted to, was mere hallucination. Nevertheless, the last form of idolatry to submit to the power of the cross, was that which, while as vain and as impious as the rest, was in this near alliance with the imagination;—an inventive power, which can so adorn the creations of falsehood

LECT. II. that they shall pass for truth, and be more agreeable than truth. As touched by the approach of reason, the whole fabric of the Grecian mythology crumbled into ruin; but when seen through the distant and false medium of which we are now speaking, the result was widely different.

Similar to what we have now described has been the effect of an irregular exercise of this power on the part of the majority of the people of Christendom, from the dawning of the Protestant reformation to our own age. To sustain the pretensions of a false and pernicious system, it has called forth all the strength of hereditary feeling, and all the venerableness of ancient time. The generations of the past have seemed to rise at its bidding, and to live again amid their scenes of enterprise and splendour, of which those time-worn structures, that still arrest the eye of the traveller, are the memorials. From the midst of visions of this nature, made to occupy all the perceptions and feelings of the soul, a voice has been heard to say, that to abandon the religion of ancestors would be next in baseness to a desertion of their standard in the day of battle; that to forego the catholic faith, must be to forsake the path of tribes and nations whose blood is still flowing in our veins—that all who so do must needs treat the christian priesthood,—the men who have been the depositaries of all the seeds of improvement through

nearly a thousand years in the world's history, as impious knaves, or, at best, as persons of small account; and must evince the exceeding refinement which their intelligence, their modesty, and their taste have undergone, by pouring contempt on the many forms of poetic beauty and greatness which genius has lavished on the religion of the tent-maker and the fisherman, so as to place it, for ages and generations, in fitting connexion with the camp and the college, with the hut of the peasant and the throne of the prince!

The effect of appeals of this sort, where there is a predominance of imagination, is to bear the feelings and the whole mind along with them. Yet is the stream a stream of falsehood. To guard the unwary against these syren melodies, and to detect the spirit of imposture pervading such representations, is the province of reason. Nor can it be needful, before my present auditory, that I should make any attempt to prove, that the very conduct which an unbridled imagination has thus allied with whatever is pitiable in intellect and in sympathy, may be the effect of a superior reason, which, while conceding to every subordinate capability its due exercise, maintains its own legitimate supremacy, proceeding onward, with a devout rectitude of purpose, in the course appearing to be most in accordance with the honour of the Divine Redeemer, and the eternal interests of men;—in short, that it may be the majesty of principle, as opposed to

LECT. II. the idle fancies which flit before the dreaming or the drunken.

Time, however, would fail us to expatiate on the modes in which an extravagant imagination can derange the proper relations of things, and substitute its own devices in the place of truth. It will be remembered that the writings of critics and philosophers abound in cautions and instructions relating to the wise use of this endowment—so marked is the tendency to mistake wherever it exceeds its just limits. And with regard to religion, the connexion which this has with so much that is of necessity but imperfectly known—with the unseen, the spiritual, and the infinite—must ever render it peculiarly liable to misconception from the insidious colourings which this faculty can so readily supply. Hence, there is scarcely any thing in the doctrine, the morals, or the institutions of the gospel, the history of which would not furnish large illustration of the disorders occasioned by excess in the quarter to which we now advert. If we read of ages when the truths of our redemption were veiled from the apprehension of men by an imposing ritual; when the observance of such a ritual was allowed to usurp the place of moral excellence and religious character; when the simple and benign laws of the church of Christ became more intricate and oppressive than the laws of secular kingdoms; if there came a time when christian pastors learnt to affect the authority

of sovereigns, and when the simple-hearted and happy believer was changed to an inhabitant of the convent, the cave, or the desert, haunted there by a thousand miserable recollections, and by as many fancied influences from the worlds above and beneath him—in all those transformations, and in others, without number, the most powerful agency will perhaps be found to have been an imagination without proper control, becoming at once the stimulant and the slave of our earthborn propensities.

Whence the importance recently attached to certain extravagant speculations said to be derived from the language of the prophets?—mainly because they supplied a sort of enchanted ground where the imagination could hold its revels as it pleased. And whence the still more arrogant pretensions, the sound of which, though ready to die, is still heard? In all this the work of a fond imagination is not a little apparent. The dull realities of humble piety are made to give place to a kind of theological romance. As minds of a depraved taste are ever turning from the sobrieties of history to the extravagance of fiction, deeming every book a burden which does not treat of the joyous or the terrible in an amount much beyond the average state of human affairs,—so is it with this class of religionists. Their favourite minister must possess the faculty of invention in large measure, dealing much in the marvellous. Sober theology

LECT. II. to them is just what all sober books are to the thorough-paced novel reader. It is no doubt true that vanity does much toward producing this kind of taste. Novel readers are always endeavouring to persuade themselves that they shall some day or other be very great people; and the same feeling is ever disposing this class of professors to regard themselves as being, in some peculiar manner, the temples of the Lord, and as destined to some pre-eminent distinction. But here, again, it is the work of a treacherous imagination, so to fill the pathway of such persons with the images of their coveted greatness, as to lure them onward in a course where the least evil that can ensue is the bitterness of disappointment. In fact, the excess of this faculty is a kind of mental intoxication, and those who are subject to it may generally be seen reeling to and fro, moved from their stedfastness by every passing wind of doctrine.

Corruption of Christianity from Undue Sensibility.

2. We observe, in the next place, that an UNDUE SENSIBILITY is frequently a cause of error, and especially with reference to religion. There are minds the native texture of which evidently includes more of this property than others. But, whether natural, or the effect of circumstances, its tendency, like that of an unrestrained imagination, is to disturb the clear and full exercise of the understanding, and thus to bring error and suffering in its train. Imagination and sensibility are both in a great degree necessary to a

lively perception of the great or the beautiful; and, in fact, they are generally found together. It may suffice, however, to remark, that these are the properties which contribute most toward the formation of what is called the poetical temperament; and we may appeal to the lives of poets, as having been too generally marked by those mistakes of all kinds, which naturally follow from an undue susceptibility of impression. The vessel tossed on the elements of feeling and fancy has little prospect of reaching the haven of truth. Reason, thrust ever and anon from its place by these disturbing forces, can perform its office but imperfectly, and shipwreck often ensues.

When an undue sensibility is associated with a marked weakness of understanding, its subject becomes a prey to all the petty occurrences of life, so that the death of a favourite animal may be, for a time, hardly less afflicting than the loss of an inheritance. And even when allied with a superior intellect, it may bring with it changes of feeling not less frequent or excessive—becoming the occasion of excitements generally adverse to the discovery of truth and to personal happiness, especially when acted upon by an irritable temper. The agitations which accompanied the first French Revolution filled the lunatic asylums of Paris. But such effects are every day resulting from less formidable causes; and where insanity, as commonly viewed, does not follow, there may be a partial obscuration of the

LECT. II. reason, sufficient to account for false views and false impressions without number. In fact, there is some degree of madness common to all flesh, and the tendencies now alluded to are among the most potent in producing its increase;—and why should it be deemed incredible that these causes should operate with much of their wonted untowardness in reference to Christianity?

When we know that the poet Cowper meditated suicide before he became the subject of religious feeling, we cease to be surprised that his views even of revealed religion should be sometimes of a gloomy complexion. And passing over other facts, the history of the appeals made to our susceptibility of mere emotion, in the Romish forms of polity and worship; and the special success which has attended the fiction of a middle state, and the practice of masses for the dead, are points showing sufficiently the ease with which our imperfectly governed feelings may be arrayed against the claims of scriptural truth.

Corruption of Christianity from the Influence of Disease.

3. With these simply natural causes, affecting the purity of the christian religion, we may connect DISEASE—or a temperament marked by physical debility. There are minds which seem resolved to assert their independence of the body, exhibiting an elasticity and energy presenting a forcible contrast to the condition of the inferior nature. But such instances are not frequent. In general, the nature of the physical system has a very perceptible and

powerful influence on the inner man, especially in whatever connects itself with the feelings. The general effect of a diseased and enfeebled body, is to lower the animal spirits, and through that channel to people the past with regrets, and the future with forebodings. It often induces a timidity unfavourable to a becoming search after truth,—begetting a readiness to acquiesce in the nearest view of things, should that be of a nature to soothe what is tremulous in the spiritual sympathies. It is not when drooping in his sick chamber that we should prefer consulting a friend as to the probability of success in some laborious and dangerous enterprise. We should rather choose an interval of ease and health, as being much more conducive to a just estimate of difficulty and danger. Now the invalids in every community will always form a numerous class, and the effect, in consequence, of their habits, on the aggregate spirit and conduct of society, must always be considerable. Their general tendency is toward that mental indolence, and those habits of credulity and prejudice, which we have observed to be so prevalent and injurious.

The truths and spirit of our holy religion have indeed suffered little from this cause, in comparison with the evils which have resulted from the preceding. There is often a gracious influence vouchsafed to the suffering, through the atonement of the cross, rendering the season of bodily infirmity the time of better thoughts

LECT. II. and heavenly aspirations. But this is not always the case. Even with the most devout believer, impaired health has sometimes the effect of lessening his capabilities of religious enjoyment, and it may be even the main cause in producing a feeling of spiritual desertion—the terrors of despair. With the much larger class of persons whose profession of Christianity is purely the effect of education, the cause we have now touched upon has often so strong a tendency to produce religious apprehension, that priestcraft, as every one must be aware, has never palmed its devices on men so easily, as when approaching them in the seclusion of sickness, or on the bed of death. Our statute of mortmain is only one amid the innumerable attempts of civil rulers to secure the property of the sick and the dying, from the rapacity of men who might be disposed to take advantage of the infirmities of the human mind at such seasons. To the state of such all men come soon or late; and to the danger of strengthening by example the misconceptions of religion, which are too common in that state, we are all liable. We may add also that this danger is always increased in proportion to what may have been the irreligion of our previous character;—the mind of the depraved being exposed at such a crisis to every extreme of delusion, from the lowest insensibility on the one hand, to the most superstitious extravagance on the other.

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Before we conclude our observations on this class of tendencies, it will be proper to remark, that if an excess of imagination and sensibility must involve the predispositions we have described, there is also a bias in an opposite direction, that will generally mark a defectiveness in these properties. The man of sluggish perceptions and small emotion, may do much, in his way, toward the corruption of Christianity. He may adopt it so partially, and so coldly, as to convey, not only an imperfect, but a mistaken and injurious impression with respect to its character and design. Nor is the man of high-toned health to be regarded as without his peculiar inclinations—such as may lead, in many ways, if not under proper discipline, to defective and false views of the gospel.

Defective Imagination and Sensibility, and a state of high Health, often the occasion of mistaken views of Christianity.

We now proceed to notice the Causes of the corruption of Christianity which are included in the present condition of the Appetites and Passions. And in doing so, it will hardly be needful to observe, that apart from the influence of tendencies of this nature, those which have already passed under our review would have been, in nearly all cases, much less powerful, and in some instances unknown. In adverting to certain causes pertaining to intellectual character and natural temperament, we must repeat, that we have regarded them simply as *facts*, and as facts from which a corruption of Christianity, similar to what has taken place, was to have

Corruption of Christianity from the present condition of the Appetites and Passions.

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been expected. The degree in which these causes are themselves the effect of disorder elsewhere, is another, and a distinct question, and one to which, without further preface, we now invite your attention.

Corruption of Christianity from the influence of Sensuality.

III. 1. One very obvious cause of the indolence observable in the human mind with regard to Christianity, and of the perverseness with which it moves in relation to that subject, even when it does move, will be found in the SENSUALITY so dominant in the world. The disposition most prevalent is that which limits the inquiries of men to *what they shall eat, what they shall drink, and wherewithal they shall be clothed.* About these matters, or things of the same earthly description, all the solicitudes of a large portion of the human race are engaged. Whatever promises the means of animal gratification is so attractive with these persons, that their leading object in all their plans and exertions is to secure indulgences of this nature to the largest extent. Sensual pleasure, in some of its many shapes, is habitually honoured as the chief good.

The effect of such habits upon the character is always manifest. In the many, they conduce to a state of ignorance and insensibility, from whence the grossest brutality often proceeds. And when connected with higher station, these lusts of the flesh too frequently produce effects which merit even a louder censure; as in the

court of our Charles the Second, and in that of his splendid contemporary in a neighbouring nation. It is not denied that we sometimes meet with natural shrewdness, and considerable acquirement, where there is much sensuality. But the result is only the more injurious. In such instances, the capabilities of the mind are constrained to act as a sort of bribed deponents on the side of the sensual inclinations. With the more vulgar sensualist, the penalties of law are meant to supply the place of a proper sense of right and wrong. At the same time, we see that with the more elevated class of these offenders, justice, truth, clemency, all come ere long to be matters of mere expediency. Their appetites are their god, and, as much as in them lies, they make all things do homage to the appetites. That a condition of human nature so generally adverse to mental culture, and to all the proprieties of social conduct, should lead, in many cases, to a total rejection of Christianity, would appear to be only the natural course of things. And if there should be artificial motives inducing such men to profess an adoption of Christianity, it is almost certain that the system so adopted will not be the system of spiritual truths announced in the gospel, but some mutilated and perverted exhibition of them. How can they believe, who, instead of endeavouring to rise up from the earthly to the heavenly, would bring down the heavenly to the lowest level of the earthly?

LECT. II. Now, it must not be forgotten, that in every state of society which history presents, the majority clearly belong to this degraded class. And while the many, thus besotted, perish through lack of knowledge, we see not a few of the opulent and the powerful in the same path, and courting the same destruction,—the impure giving themselves to some Herodias, and the drunken wedded to their cups.

Corruption of Christianity from the influence of Worldliness.

2. But there is a subjection to the senses less injurious to the present character of the individual and to society than the sensuality we have now described, and which we may designate by the term WORLDLINESS—a word of milder, but of still larger meaning. We use it to denote that absorbing interest about the means of worldly reputation and enjoyment, which seems to affirm that the true end of human existence is to be busied in the pursuit of those humbler forms of credit and of pleasure, which are generally attainable in the present state. Such as is seen in the husbandman, whose one thought is about his lands; in the man accustomed to traffic, ever concerned with his prudent calculations and his gains; or in the anxious mother of a family, whose many plannings and doings are all meant to end in the worldly comfort and advancement of her children. In every civilized community this class will be a numerous one.

But is there anything large or generous to be expected from such persons? Is it to these that

the patriot or the philanthropist may look when pressed with toil and danger? Narrow views, and narrower sympathies, are usually attendant on habits of this nature—such as will generally leave the worst matters in society wholly undisturbed, so long as they do not trespass on that little circle of decent selfishness in which these worshippers of quiet indulgence are wont to practise their daily devotions. With these persons, public profession, and general conduct, in the common affairs of life, are matters regulated entirely with a view to what may be favourable to their local respectability, their domestic ease, their every-day comfort.

Now, the connexion between the ruling attachments of the persons we have described, and a corruption of Christianity as adopted by them, must be at once evident. That such minds will resort to evasion, in order to escape from the claims of the gospel when adduced, is clearly predicted in the parable which presents one as pleading that he has bought five yoke of oxen, and must needs go and prove them; another, that he has purchased a piece of ground, and must needs go and see it; and a third, that he has married a wife, and must on that account be excused. And where the gospel is not thus a matter of avowed neglect, the effect of these worldly preferences is to dispose the mind to such views of it as may render it as little inconvenient as possible to a spirit of worldliness. Nor

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need I remind you that there is a Christianity so divested of the spiritual and eternal, as to be congenial with natures thus *of the earth earthy*. That indolence, and that credulity and prejudice, which we have seen to be so adverse to the purity of the christian profession, derive not a little of their strength from this source.

We may add, that the aims of the more intellectual, and ambitious, among worldly men, are not to be excepted, in any important respect, from this general censure. But before we make any observation on this fact, we must notice a source of error more nearly connected with the habit of the class of minds now adverted to, and which we may describe by the word FORMALITY.

Corruption of Christianity from the tendency to Formality.

3. The people of every age and country have shown a readiness to view religion as consisting rather in certain outward usages, than in the state of the mind—in its habit of reflection and feeling. This inclination may be said to have developed itself in two ways—first, by substituting a show of zeal in behalf of religious institutions, in the place of all real concern about the object of worship; and secondly, by allowing the observance of certain religious forms not only to take the precedence of moral obedience, but to operate as an imaginary atonement for moral delinquencies.

No modern zealot has more loudly proclaimed

his vows of attachment to the religion,—or, in the oratorical phrase, to the altars, of his country, than was the custom both of the populace and the powerful in the nations of antiquity. The men of Ephesus, who cried for the space of two hours, *great is Diana of the Ephesians*, did no more than the men of any other city would have done in the same circumstances. To erect temples, to support a priesthood, and to furnish the means of sacrifices and pageantry, were all regarded as acts of piety. But the aids necessary to perpetuate these sacred usages being once supplied, there was presumed to be a sanctity in the priestly character, and a gratefulness to the objects of worship in priestly services, which went far toward discharging the worshipper himself from all further obligation. Hence, if any questioning arose about the established religion, nothing was more common than an appeal to the number and costliness of religious edifices, and religious processions, and to the honours attached to the consecrated persons on whom it devolved to see that all proper homage to the superior powers was duly rendered. At the same time, nothing was further from being common than an appeal to the *character* of the people professing this religion, as affording any real evidence in its favour. Remote ancestors, indeed, were sometimes described as having been a very pious people ; but any reference of this kind made to contemporaries was felt to be

LECT. II. worse than useless. In short, the religion of each individual was felt to be identified with the religion of his country, and the religion of his country was a sort of visible machine, which, once put into motion, was presumed to achieve whatever was most important to be done,—a kind of national oblation, continually offering, and continually operating as an expiation for the sins of the people.

Nor is it doubtful that this transfer of the whole conduct of religion to its ministers,—just as we concede the skill of medicine or of law to their respective practitioners, was quite as much the work of the people as of the priest. It was their will to have it so, or so it would not have been. Priests may have availed themselves of the inclination, but they did not create it, and without it they would have laboured in vain. Men were not so fallen as to have lost all sense of religious duty. But, from various causes, it was deemed well that the duty to be performed should consist mainly in outward services, and that these services should be understood to be best rendered by a class of persons piously consecrated, and as piously maintained for the purpose. Hence, each man's religion consisted, almost exclusively, in his being a friend to the religion of his country, and the religion of his country, excepting in the instance of the games and pageants to which the people were admitted, was a matter confided to the priests.

The religion of such persons is obviously a religion by proxy;—and, absurd as any such notion of religion may be, it is nevertheless true, that as long as it shall be a tendency hardly separable from human nature, to substitute a zeal for certain things connected with religion, in the place of religion itself, the religion of the majority will probably consist of little more than a poor subterfuge of this sort. The things which the Apostle counted nothing, that he might win Christ, were precisely the things which his formalist countrymen judged to be every thing.

This tendency, manifested so long and so widely in the earth, could not fail to operate to the corruption of Christianity. That it has so operated is but too notorious. What ancient heathenism was in these respects, that established Christianity very soon became. And not only through the ages of darkness long since passed away, but to the present hour, the multitude of nominal Christians will be found to have been more or less ensnared by this treacherous propensity of our fallen nature. As the heathen man generally satisfied himself with supporting the religious institutions of his country, and in exacting a professional self-denial from its priesthood;—so it has happened that many of the most vicious beings, assuming the christian name, have been distinguished by an appearance of zeal on the side of the established forms of Christianity, and even in favour of ascetic pretensions

LECT. II on the part of its votaries. Such men appear to have concluded, that the encouragement of an apparent sanctity, and even of ultra-religious pretension in others, would be admitted as a kind of propitiation for their own flagrant deficiencies and misdeeds. To be numbered with the friends of monastic fraternities and of churchmen, has been much less difficult than to become a Christian in the sense of a pure Christianity; but it does not seem to have been at all difficult for men to persuade themselves that the one thing was much the same with the other.

And what do we see in the religion of myriads among Protestants beyond a miserable imposture of this sort? Sensuality, worldliness, and malevolence, all are too often indulged without fear, because connected with noisy avowals of devotion to certain ecclesiastical names and practices;—*tithing the mint, the anise, and the cummin*, but neglecting the weightier matters of the law, *judgment, mercy, and faith*. The disposition to put the sign in the place of the thing signified;—to halt in the means, forgetful of the end, is foreboding enough. But much more alarming is it when men regard their seeming zeal about the forms of religion, as conferring on them a liberty to violate its spirit;—when so much virtue is conceived to be in their clamour about their sectarian pecularities, as to render it a small thing that they indulge in the fraud necessary to become devourers of widows' houses, or that they should

resort to both fraud and force for the purpose of removing opposition to the progress of their favourite maxims or opinions.

Despicable as this conduct may appear, when rightly viewed, there is nothing to which human nature is more disposed. We must not presume that there is any religious party in which the elements of this evil may not be found. In general, it is so obvious that the slightest attention will detect it. In some quarters it may operate less directly and visibly, but still to an injurious, and even to a fatal extent. A man may adopt a scriptural creed, and worship God after a scriptural form, and the very consciousness that his creed is what it is, and that his mode of worship is what it is, may lead him to assume, much too hastily, in favour of his personal religion ; or at least may beget a confidence of being right and safe, not at all conducive to that humility, that vigilance, and that prayerfulness, without which the consistency of our religious character will certainly fail. Our spirit may not be that of Christianity because we boast of being the descendants of men who were distinguished by the purity of their christian profession. We may be Abraham's seed, and nevertheless be in bondage ; the only difference, perhaps, between us and others being, that as our mistakes have been the least excusable, our delusion may be the stronger—the more hopeless.

In an attempt to ascertain the influence of the passions on the decisions of the understanding

LECT. II. with regard to Christianity, the desire of admiration,—or the passion which the term VANITY is used to designate, is much too potent in its influence to be overlooked.

Corruption of Christianity from Vanity.

4. It will be confessed that much value should be attached to the esteem of the intelligent and the praiseworthy. Humility will ever demand that this measure of deference should be readily conceded to the wise and good. Placed, moreover, in social connexions, there are strong social sympathies by which we are linked to each other; and from the proper exercise of these, implanted assuredly by the Author of our being, nothing can follow unfavourable to the welfare of the individual, or of the circle about him. But this tendency, which was meant to serve as an important cord in the fraternal union of the species, and as a means of stability to truth and goodness, is now liable, in common with every other in man, to the most pernicious misdirection. Instead of regarding the approval of men as valuable, only while in agreement with the will of God, we are prone to view the approbation of mortals as a sort of rule in itself,—even the authority of God being made subordinate to it, or perhaps habitually neglected. In such instances, the question is not, what saith the Scripture?—but what saith the many, or the more conspicuous and influential in our social connexions? That minds in this condition will altogether discard Christianity, or grossly corrupt it, is taught most

emphatically in the inquiry addressed by the Saviour to certain vain-hearted Pharisees:—*How can ye believe which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?*

It is only necessary that we observe the vanity of mankind, in its ordinary modes of operation, to be aware at once of its injurious effects when brought in contact with an order of things so little in agreement with it as is presented in the gospel. In minds of a feeble and passive character, this passion may dispose to little more than a scrupulous conformity with whatever may chance to be most in reputation; and in such cases it proves a forcible ally of prejudice. But the moderate, the noiseless, the unobtrusive, are far from affording a congenial element to persons strongly influenced by this disposition—such parties must be ever verging toward extremes.

The strength of this passion is not unfrequently betrayed in a preference of whatever is paradoxical and eccentric, leading men to estimate opinions and practices more according to their fitness to procure distinction, than from any consideration of their claims to truth and propriety. "If I were not Alexander," said the great conqueror, "I would be Diogenes;"—*something* I would be, which should give me separation from the crowd, and a name. The extravagant notions, and pernicious maxims, which have owed their existence mainly to an

LECT. II. aspiring or a mortified vanity, can be neither described nor enumerated. With not a few in this class of minds, notoriety, and a kind of stage-effect, constitute the charm and glory of existence. To such results all moral considerations are more or less subordinate. Thus the vanity of being thought fearless and untrammelled, may give a transient popularity to atheism itself; —and where the worst evils are produced on society, the effect may be viewed with complacency, if regarded as indicating the brilliancy or importance of the party producing them.

And when the vain man does not thus openly forsake the path of truth, there is a consciousness, or a simplicity, in its character, which rarely fails to occasion much complaining and disgust. If admitted at all, it must be in some greatly amended — that is, in some greatly corrupted form. Something new and peculiar must be engrafted upon it, that this also may minister to the ruling passion. With such a man it matters comparatively little whether his state be one of enjoyment or suffering; whether he be in splendour or in poverty; the greatest of all evils in his estimation being to have an every-day allotment,—such as might leave him to be overlooked or neglected.

It should be observed also, that nothing is more common than disappointed vanity; and that the resentment attending such disappointments is of a kind to produce the most injurious effects.

When associated with a weak understanding, (its only fitting connexion) it may frequently operate as a protection against the shafts of ridicule. But even in such cases, these will in the issue be so shaped and directed as not often to fail of their object. When existing along with superior general intelligence, as it sometimes does, its effect is a peculiar sensitiveness to ridicule; and this is inseparable from a greater exposure to suffering when assailed, and to the consequent dominance of malevolent passions. LECT. II.

But if there be so marked a tendency in vanity, and its kindred passions, to disturb the proper discipline both of the understanding and the heart, in relation to all the general objects with which human nature is conversant, it would obviously be most unreasonable to expect that an influence of this kind should be without its deleterious effects on Christianity. And, indeed, volumes might be occupied in showing the manner in which this potent cause has thus wrought. The temper which in civil affairs has so often discarded all the lessons of wisdom and experience; which would so frequently consign whatever has existed without its aid (and for that sole reason) to oblivion, or so change its character as to claim the merit of creating it—the temper which, in conforming with what is established, infuses everywhere a fondness for theatrical display, a thirst for pre-eminence, the envy that sickens at success; in a word, which

LECT. II. would have all external existence tributary to itself—this is the temper, which, in reference to Christianity, has done much, very much, toward producing those marvellous changes which meet us at every step in our comparison of the earlier and later history of the Church. That deluded and perilous state of mind which we intend by the terms spiritual pride, is the direct offspring of this disposition. It is the vanity of being deemed more holy than other religionists, filling the place that would else have been occupied by the vanity of wealth or power, rank or beauty.

Corruption of Christianity from Pride.

5. We must not conclude this rapid view of the tendencies in human nature, affecting the state of Christianity in the world, without adverting to the influence of PRIDE. The effect of this passion on all matters relating to human conduct, or coming within the range of human inquiry, must be everywhere visible. So far as it partakes of an undue self-estimation, it bears a semblance to vanity; — but it is more self-sustained, having less to do with the sentiment of others than with the persuasion of the individual. Hence a multitude of circumstances which operate as with the force of law upon the vain, are sternly and effectually resisted by the proud. But to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think, must be to think erroneously as to all the relations in which we are placed, both with respect to men and the Creator. It is an error, having its place at the root of our

moral arithmetic, which must necessarily extend itself through the whole process.

In general pursuits, pride will often supply a stimulus to exertion. But there is much in its usual influence from which evil must result rather than good. It ever produces a dislike of obligation, which, in reference to the discovery of truth, must ever be exceedingly detrimental. To be proudly negligent of the labour of others, is, in such cases, to be busied with the alphabet of things when we might be acquiring a mastery of their language;—the man, moreover, who has formed an extravagant estimate of his own capability, will probably under-rate the effort necessary to success; and instead of profiting by the reproofs which his failures may call forth, will generally become indignant, warped in the future exercise of his judgment, and wedded to his mistakes, however preposterous. The history of every people is pregnant with the ill effects of systems and enterprises, which have owed their origin chiefly to this passion;—either in its palmy state, when swollen by conceptions of superior power; or in its state of resentment, when wounded by opposition. In all matters of opinion it has been the parent of innumerable errors, and in social life it has produced all possible disorder and suffering. Whatever presumption has done, it has done as the first-born of pride; and whatever tyranny has done, it has done as the favoured offspring of the same parent.

LECT. II. Viewed in its influence on Christianity, it must be apparent that the tendency of pride will be to give plausibleness, and efficiency, to everything that may favour those elated conceptions as to the present condition of human nature, which persons of this character are ever disposed to entertain. When a man of this class is also a man of some benevolence, the flattering judgment which he has formed of himself may be the effect, in part, of a similar misconception with regard to the intellectual, or the moral power of the mind in general;—and his persuasion will perhaps be, that his plea is not urged so much in his own behalf, as in behalf of the species.

But, however modified by this, or by other causes, the habit of mind now considered is in direct opposition to the avowed spirit of the first preachers of the gospel; to the most explicit injunctions of holy writ; and to the natural tendency of the doctrine which it promulgates. There are lessons involved in this doctrine, with regard to the present state of the human understanding, and of the human heart, which must render a lowly docility under the teachings of inspiration, and the deepest self-abasement on account of our guilt and corruption, a reasonable service. There is a marked peculiarity in this respect in the christian doctrine, which imparts itself to the christian character; but a peculiarity with which the proud will be especially offended. The

impression of such minds is, that men only need make the effort, in order to become both as wise and as good as duty may require. But it is the doctrine of Scripture that men are blind in heart, and that if they ever attain to true wisdom, *He who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, must shine into their hearts, to give them the light of the knowledge of his glory, as it shines in the face of Jesus Christ.* And as to our sufficiency for duties, strictly religious, spiritual, heavenly in their character,—the doctrine of Paul is, *In me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing.* It is a divine energy which must descend upon us, if we are *turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God.* In these, and in a multitude of similar passages in Scripture, we have acknowledgments with respect to our fallen and dependent condition, which must be as gall and wormwood to the haughty prepossessions of the children of this world. LECT. II.

Should we not, then, lay our account that minds of this complexion will sometimes discard revealed truth altogether, and, perhaps, betray in relation to it all the bitterness of a personal animosity? And when the difficulties of a course thus decided prove insurmountable, (as will often be the case), should we not expect that the utmost effort will be made in order to demonstrate that tenets so little pleasing have no place in the Bible? This follows upon the very obvious

LECT. II. ground, that the things opposed to a ruling propensity, whether they are the matters of religious faith, or of ordinary life, will be resisted by that propensity to the amount of its strength. It is in human nature to free itself from the unwelcome; and to lessen the annoyance that may not admit of being wholly removed. The great enemy of man is not ill-content that the name of Christianity should be retained, if its substance and glory be forgotten.

The Causes of the Corruption of Christianity all spring from Human Nature.

In conclusion;—if the nature of the tendencies to which we have now adverted be well considered, the fact that Christianity has been generally and deeply corrupted, much as we may lament it, can hardly occur as mysterious. The various causes tending to this result, are so widely-spread, so permanent, and so powerful, as at once to supply its explanation. Nor will any process of inquiry on the subject before us be satisfactory, which does not rest on just and comprehensive views of human nature. The whole struggle between the true religion and the false, resolves itself into a struggle with humanity; human nature being the parent of all the false systems to which the true is opposed. It is with this nature, subject to these tendencies, that Christianity has to maintain its warfare. Its having to contend with these dispositions in a direct form, or as operating through existing institutions, is a mere circumstance, not at all affecting the realities of the conflict. Popery

itself is nothing more than depraved humanity; and may exist, not only in different degrees, but under many modifications and different names.

The partial effect of the Gospel as a remedy for the depravity of mankind, no valid objection to its claims.

It is true that for the depravity of human nature, whence this conflict has its origin, the gospel claims to be an efficient remedy. And surely it will not be affirmed that Christianity is no such remedy, because it has not been applied universally, completely, and at once. The analogies of nature and providence all loudly protest against so heedless an assumption. We do not question the divine appointment of conscience, because it is often vitiated, and sometimes wholly dethroned. We do not say of magistracy, that it is no ordinance of God, because it has so often degenerated into injustice and oppression. Nor does the Deist regard the pretensions of his boasted theism as altogether unsound, though he must know that it is a doctrine, which, apart from the influence of revelation, has hardly found a dwelling-place on earth. Neither should the remedy in the gospel be suspected, because successful only in its present mode, and to its present extent. It does, indeed, bear a divine power along with it, which, in the view of its Author, precludes all contingency from its history. But though it shall *prosper in the thing whereto he has sent it*, it so comes as to leave place for the action of all the tendencies we have named, and of many beside. Doubt the truth of Christianity, because of the errors which men

LECT. II. have mixed up with it, and the same cause of doubt will attend you in every new theory you may take up, leaving nothing before you short of a universal scepticism. The course of events preliminary to the introduction of Christianity filled a space of four thousand years; during an interval of nearly half that extent it has had to contend with every conceivable form of violence and fraud, and to demonstrate its vitality by its continued existence and growing influence. That what remains will be the period of its special triumph seems to be predicted alike by the language of the ancient prophets and by the present aspect of human affairs. The extent of this triumph will be such as to embrace all nations; its duration the future only can determine; but when its last achievement on earth shall have been accomplished, the ages of eternity will remain to call forth its more perfect development, and the larger communication of its blessings.

LECTURE III.

ON THE CORRUPTION OF CHRISTIANITY FROM MISAPPREHENSIONS OF JUDAISM.

LECTURE III.

ROM. IX. 6.

They are not all Israel which are of Israel.

In the preceding Lectures, my endeavour has been to place human nature before you as partaking of certain tendencies, all of which must have operated more or less unfavourably with respect to the purity of the christian religion. In so doing, I have avoided all inquiry with respect to the influence of those conventional systems and usages, whether secular or religious, by which the tendencies examined have been, of necessity, very powerfully affected. That these are constantly acted upon, both in the individual, and in society, by external circumstances, is unquestionable; and in the following Lectures, my object will be to trace their development in connexion with such opinions and customs as were most influential among those portions of the human race whose profession of Christianity has contributed in any marked degree to its corruption.

We have seen that there is both an intellectual and a moral bias common to mankind, which

LECT. III. must always endanger the strict integrity of the intelligent and the pure, and this in proportion to its intelligence and purity;—a bias, in consequence, which must expose Christianity—transcendant in the elevation of its principles and the purity of its design—to peculiar peril. It will now appear that there have been systems, and social peculiarities, which, while owing nearly every thing in their character to these general tendencies in man, have always exercised a visible re-action upon human nature, and one equally potent and injurious. Man has created them, or moulded them according to his own impressions of fitness, and, as the result, has become more confirmed in his own dangerous habitudes;—the inventions of a fallen nature generally serving rather to increase than diminish its thraldom. It is not, therefore, with man, considered in himself, or merely in his social relations, that we now have to do; but with man as subject to the superadded agency of those more systematic forms of sentiment or usage which may be peculiar to certain communities, or to certain times and places. The effect produced on character by the ordinary intercourse of social life is always observable; but this is, in a great degree, distinct from what is produced upon a people by their philosophical predilections, and especially by the nature of their religious profession. It is important that we judge rightly when viewing men simply as

men; but what men are likely to become as subject to the influence of judaism or paganism, or as attached to any particular class of mental speculations, is another question, and one no less deserving consideration. To the object we have in view, it is not only requisite that we know what man is, considered, as far as may be, abstractedly; but that we also know *when* and *where* his allotment has befallen him,—in other words, that we obtain full information as to what are the checks, and what are the aids, that will go along with his natural tendencies in the particular path assigned him. It follows, therefore, that the general aspects of human nature, exhibited in the preceding Lectures, will be continually recurring; but they will recur as connected with those circumstances relating to the state of society, and in connexion with those philosophical and religious preferences, by which whatever is common to human nature has been materially influenced. LECT III.

In this view, the effects of the ancient systems of philosophy on the doctrine and practice of the visible church, will claim our attention; together with the influence of that diversified paganism, which, though abandoned in name, was retained in much of its spirit, and, not unfrequently, in its precise forms, along with a profession of the gospel. But before we proceed to these topics, the corrupt state of Judaism at the period of the Advent must be considered,—this being a cause

LECT. III. of the corruption of Christianity intimately connected with its origin, and particularly observable in its early history.

And in forming a judgment on this point, especially in relation to our present object, it will be proper to examine the state of religion among the descendants of Abraham, not only as it may appear in Judea, but as conveyed by the history of that perhaps equally numerous division of this remarkable people, who, subsequent to the conquests of Alexander, were scattered through other lands, particularly in Egypt, and to whom Alexandria was almost as another Jerusalem.

Nor should the condition of the Samaritans be overlooked :—a people who were not without a mixture of Jewish blood, and who were distinguished from the rest of the world, through many centuries, by the degree in which they had adopted the faith and manners of the Jewish people.

True Character of Judaism.

The announcements made by Moses and the prophets with regard to the character and offices of the Messiah, are in strict agreement with what is taught on these points in the New Testament. It is confessed that the predictions of the ancient prophets on this subject are less frequent, and much less explicit, than the historical statements relating to it in the writings of the evangelists and apostles. It has pleased the only wise God that the depositions of

the inspired witnesses should be such as to bring the stupendous facts of the christian redemption before the notice of men in a way of progressive development. But even in the earliest intimations conveyed by those divinely-gifted persons, who so long testified *of the sufferings of Christ, and of the glory that should follow*, there was enough to render the men without excuse who erred from the way of peace. The Saviour, who appeared in the fulness of time, is the Deliverer promised in Eden; the same who was the object of faith to Abraham; who was described as partaking of proper humanity; as distinguished by an immaculate holiness; as a teacher having the plenitude of spiritual wisdom; as a priest whose functions were typified by the services of all other priests; as possessing divine authority, so as to be the universal lawgiver, ruler, and judge; and as the Redeemer of Jew and Gentile submitting to his authority, from all guilt, and pollution, and unhappiness. Nor must it be omitted, that the more ancient of the inspired writers, who speak with this strength of expression as to the personal greatness and the official glory of the predicted Benefactor, declare, with equal plainness, that, in order to his thus counteracting the work of Satan in the redeemed, and his thus executing the awards of justice on the finally impenitent, it would behove him to suffer from the enmity of the adversary and of mankind, and from his

LECT. III. Father's frown—even so far as to be numbered with transgressors, and to go down to the grave with the accursed.

It does not now devolve upon me to attempt any formal proof of this general statement.* But I am not aware of any thing in what has now been advanced with regard to the faith or devotion of the Jewish Church which is not clearly evinced in the recorded piety of such men as David and Isaiah. Those misconceptions in relation to the character and object of the promised Messiah, and that general depravity, which led the Jews, as a nation, to despise and reject the Saviour on his appearance among them, were the result of causes which belong mostly to the interval between the Babylonish captivity and the time of the Advent.

Character of the Samaritans.

It will be remembered, that the country called Samaria was re-peopled by a pagan colony at the command of the Assyrian conqueror, Shalmaneser, about two centuries prior to the time of Esdras. History informs us, that before the return of the Jews from Babylon, the Samaritans had agreed to acknowledge the God of the Hebrews, and that they had conformed themselves, in many respects, to the worship established at Jerusalem. But it is written, that *while they feared the Lord, they served other*

* *Vide* Dr. Smith's Scripture Testimony, I. 535—583, where texts which support the above representation are brought together.

gods; and one effect of this corruption of Judaism, was that bitter enmity between the inhabitants of Samaria and of Judea which is so memorable in their history. On the fall of the Persian monarchy, Sanballat, the governor of Samaria, obtained permission from Alexander to build a temple on Mount Gerizim, after the model of that at Jerusalem. He succeeded also in drawing over Manasses, brother of the Jewish high-priest, and a numerous body of the Jews, to become resident with his subjects, and assistants in his attempt to bring the religious practices of the Samaritans into a nearer conformity with the law of Moses. But the two nations ceased not to betray their animosity against each other, which sometimes broke forth in open and relentless hostility.*

It must also be remembered, that the corruptions of Judaism, which took place among the Samaritans, affected its doctrines no less than its ritual. If we regard the views of the woman of Samaria concerning the Messiah, as those prevalent in her country—and she can hardly be considered a very favourable instance of the state of religious knowledge in her nation—there is room to believe that whatever may have been the comparative state of information on this subject at Gerizim and Jerusalem in any former age, at the period of the advent the scale had

* 2 Kings xvii. Josephus, Antiq. B. IX. c. xiv., B. X. c. ix., B. XI. c. viii.

LECT. III. turned not a little on the side of the outcast Samaritan. The sentiments of the female adverted to, were evidently much more scriptural with regard to the nature of the Redeemer's mission than were those which had been long and almost universally entertained by the Jews. The Messiah, whom she anticipated, was to appear as the benefactor of humanity, not of the Jews only; and, as the humble circumstances of the Redeemer were evidently a less offence to the Samaritans than to the Jews, we find him speaking to them more freely than even to his own people on the subject of his great errand.

But notwithstanding all these favourable circumstances, the material fact remains, that the people introduced by Shalmaneser were heathens, and of Persian origin. Hence the speculations of the oriental philosophy, together with the usages of their parent country, contributed to produce that mixed state of things which never failed to provoke the censure, and often the misrepresentations, of their Hebrew neighbours. If they were not to be charged with idol-worship, they appear to have retained many of the doctrines and usages of the Persian Magi, and of their great prophet Zoroaster; especially with respect to those emanations, or existencies, which were conceived as intervening, in elevated gradation, between man and the Deity. Thus the heresy of Simon Magus, who is commonly spoken of as a Samaritan, was so much of this character,

that he has been often described as the founder of Gnosticism;*—a system which, as we shall see, was always most exuberant when in nearest alliance with the extravagance of an oriental imagination.

There must have been strong predisposing causes of this nature, before a whole community, from the smallest to the greatest, as the sacred historian affirms, would be found giving heed to such an impostor as Simon, proclaiming him as *the great power of God*. A people thus readily influenced by causes so much opposed to the purity of Judaism, will not be anticipated as among the purest professors of Christianity. Through all the revolutions during the first six centuries of the christian era, the Samaritans are known as a distinct, and even as a considerable people.† But while tenacious with regard to certain customs, they appear to have been easily seduced by any thing new on the subject of religion. Whether approached by Simon Magus, or by the Saviour of the world; by Menander, a disciple of Simon, or by Philip the Evangelist; multitudes were found ready to admit the novel claims that were urged upon them.‡

* Justin Martyr, Apol. II. 69—91. Irenæi, Contra Hæreses, Lib. I. c. 23.

† Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, VIII. 323.

‡ Brucker, Historia Critica Philosophiæ, II. 661—684. Mosheim, De Rebus Christianorum ante Constantinum Magnum, Seculum primum, c. ii. sect. 19, sect. 65—68. Ed. 4to. Helmstad.

LECT. III.

State of Judaism with the Dispersed among the Gentiles.

But this mixture of paganism and false philosophy with the religion of Moses, as professed by the Samaritans, became connected with that religion in perhaps an equal degree as professed by the undoubted descendants of Abraham, who were dispersed among the Gentiles; especially in the case of such as were resident in Egypt. When Alexander built the city on which he conferred his name, among the emigrant tribes whom he encouraged to settle in it, was a large number of Jews. These he secured in all the privileges belonging to any other class of citizens; and, partly in consequence of the religious motive which led them to maintain their separate state, and partly from the constant increase of their numbers and their wealth, they soon rose into prominence and power. But, unhappily, the land which had ceased to be a house of bondage to the Israelite, became a place of snares to him; and of such as brought greater evils in their train than his fathers had endured from the hand of the oppressor. The Greek language became the vernacular speech of Alexandria;—a circumstance which led to the Septuagint translation of the Scriptures; and which, together with the singularly mixed character of the population in that city, contributed to render it the home of nearly all the opinions and customs which had obtained in the civilized world. But, brought into this state of juxta-position, nothing remained precisely what it had been. The native super-

stitions were much modified by the foreign intercouse thus induced; the systems of Zoroaster and Plato lost much, in their turn, of their peculiarity; and the religion of the Jew in Alexandria, pressed by this general tendency toward assimilation, became considerably different from that of his brethren at Jerusalem. In the process by which these changes were produced, the allegorical method of interpretation, so ancient and general in its use, both among the Egyptians and orientalists, was freely applied to Holy Writ, and always with the sort of success for the sake of which it had been adopted. Subject to the action of this amalgamating power, the most stubborn theories were so far subdued, that a kind of general agreement and uniformity ensued. It became the fashion to dwell rather on the supposed resemblance, than on the differences of the various systems, whether of philosophy or religion;—so much so, that all who refused to follow this new course of things had to lay their account with being proscribed from the rank of the liberal and enlightened. The Jew, so hard to force, so easy to beguile into error, caught the infection; and learning to regard the writings of Moses as filled with a hidden meaning, he professed, by the aid of allegory, to have discovered the wisdom of the Gentiles in the law of his fathers. By some, it was insisted, that all such wisdom had been borrowed, more or less directly, from revelation; and in this manner

LECT. III. it soon came to be the general confession, that the opinions of men, on all important subjects, were really much less at issue than it had been common for ages to suppose.

It was among these exiles that the Therapeutæ arose ;—societies of men, whose fraternal regulations were derived from Pythagoras more than from Moses, and whose manners supplied a flattering precedent to those ascetic pretensions which became so frequent and excessive in later times.

Notice of Aristobulus.

But among the Alexandrian Jews who distinguished themselves by their efforts in connexion with religion, particular mention is made of Aristobulus and Philo. Of the former, little more is known than that he was a favourite with Ptolemy Philometor, and especially successful as an advocate of that mystical interpretation of the Scriptures which was meant to render the doctrines of revelation less repugnant to the tenets of the Gentile philosophy. Hence the name of Aristobulus occurs in history as that of the first corrupter of inspired wisdom in the school of Alexandria.*

— of Philo.

But the genius of Philo, and the effect of his labours, are better known. This writer was a native of Alexandria, and appears to have finished his course only a few years subsequent to the

* Brucker, Historia Philosophiæ, II. 684—703. Neander's History of the Christian Religion, I. 41—45. Matter. Essai Historique sur l'Ecole d'Alexandrie, I. 223, 188, 227.

crucifixion of the Saviour. It is not ascertained that Philo possessed any knowledge of Christianity beyond its general principles as derived from the Old Testament. But his acquaintance with the Old Testament Scriptures, and with the general learning of his time, was intimate and extensive. It must, at the same time, be confessed, that his admiration of Pythagoras and Plato, and particularly of the latter, tended but too evidently to the corruption of his faith as a disciple of Moses. Aided by the Egyptian method of allegorizing, he professed to have traced the most popular tenets in the schools of Alexandria to the writings of the Jewish lawgiver; insisting openly that most of those doctrines should be respectfully, and even devoutly entertained, as a sort of traditionary light derived originally from divine revelation.* Accordingly, his profuse commentaries on the nature of the Divine Being, on the creation and government of the world, and on the person and offices of Messiah, partake of truth and error in about equal proportions. In fact, the manner in which this author has treated the plainest histories, in order that they might be made to convey the most abstruse speculations, could have no other result than to convert the sacred volume into a book of enigmas, its most obvious meaning being ever liable to be displaced by the wildest creations of

* Opera. De Caritate, 699. De Abraham, 364. De Vita Mosis, 625.

LECT. III. the fancy. We may safely conclude, however, that the theology of Philo was not, upon the whole, more corrupt than that of the most favoured class among his brethren in Egypt and other countries; while the truly devout feeling, so frequently and so strongly expressed in his writings, was, we have room to fear, of rare existence among them.* His conceptions with regard to the nature and offices of the Divine Word, though beset with obscurities and seeming contradictions, arising in part from the philosophic jargon in which they are presented, contain some forcible exhibitions of the leading truths of revelation. The degree of coincidence, also, between his doctrines, and some points of his phraseology, on this subject, and those so prominent in the writings of the Evangelist John, and of the Apostle Paul, is such as to show that the theology of the Alexandrian Jews must have

* He speaks of every movement of the spirit in matters of religion, without the aid of Divine grace, (ἄνευ θείας ἐπιφροσύνης), as of evil tendency; and affirms it to be better that men remain unreflecting, than that "seeking to raise themselves to heaven they fall by pride." (De Migrat. Abraham, 414.) He strongly reprobates the doctrine, that man is competent to the cleansing of his own spirit without the aid of power from on high. (De Somniis, IIII.) See also De Victim. Offerent. 858. But there is a pride of peculiar illumination, having respect to the real or supposed mysteries of Scripture, which frequently comes in the place of that intellectual pride which disdains to acknowledge any thing beyond its letter; and the former attached in too great a measure to Philo and his school.

been derived, in a greater measure than may at first appear, from the Old Testament.* LECT. III.

But when the most candid allowances are made, the corrupt state of Judaism among its professors in Alexandria must be sufficiently plain; and that it should influence the state of religion in Judea was a natural consequence. That intercourse with the people of other nations, to which the Jews were exposed in their own country during the whole interval from the conquests of Alexander to the advent, rendered them familiar with the opinions and customs of their polished and powerful neighbours; and if there were some who could afford noble proof that they were not to be made parties to a corruption of the faith or worship of their ancestors, and some who proceeded to the excess of pronouncing an anathema on such of their brethren as permitted the education of their children in Grecian literature; there were many more, who, to obtain the favour of their political rulers, or from some other motive, pursued a different course, consenting to almost any adulteration of the national religion, whether by means of false doctrine, or of pagan observances.†

Origin of the Talmudic and Rabbinical literature.

One memorable effect of these deteriorating causes was, to give existence to the Talmudical and Rabbinical writings of the Jewish teachers.

* Mosheim, De Rebus Christianorum, c. i. sect. 30. Seculum Tertium, sect. 28. Neander, I. 41—49.

† Brucker, Hist. Philos. II. 690—703, 797—812.

LECT. III. The first compilation of this description, called the Jerusalem Talmud, was completed in the early part of the third century; and toward the close of the fifth, the Talmud of Babylon, by which the former has been generally superseded, made its appearance. These Talmuds consist of the Mishna, or oral law, which is the text; and of the Gemaras, which are the comments and decisions upon it by the Hebrew doctors. The Mishna itself was first committed to writing about the middle of the second century. According to the less discreet of its advocates, it contains many sublime communications made to Adam in Paradise; and which, with many of a subsequent date, were carefully transmitted by Abraham to his descendants: and according to the more dispassionate of the learned among the same people, the explanations of the law contained in the Mishna were delivered to Moses on Sinai from the mouth of Jehovah:—"The Rabbi, "Judah Hakkadosh," says David Levi, in his work on the Ceremonies of the Jews, "was the "compiler of the Mishna; for having seriously "considered the state of our nation at his time; "and also perceiving that the captivity had "already continued a long time, (he having "lived about a hundred years after the destruc- "tion of the temple); and that those learned in "the oral law began to decrease; and justly "apprehending that the face of affairs might one "day grow worse; he came to the resolution of

" compiling and digesting into one body, all LECT. III.
" those doctrines and practices of our church,
" which had been preserved and conveyed down
" to posterity by oral tradition, from the time of
" the elders and the prophets, the men of the
" great synagogue, and also the Mishnical doctors,
" down to his own time. All these he commit-
" ted to writing, and arranged under six general
" heads, called *Sedorim*,—orders, or classes."
This compilation was no sooner published than it was generally received. The commentaries, which, taken with it, constitute the Talmud, being the production of men differing much from each other in their capabilities, and in their philosophical and theological prepossessions, the result is a mixture of some fragments of truth, with a mass of error, imbecility, and extravagance.

The Cabala.

And if any addition of folly or fanaticism may have been needed, it was abundantly supplied by another offspring of Hebrew degeneracy called the Cabala. This designation was applied to a class of writings exhibiting a certain mystical mode of expounding the law. The Mishna was described as " the soul of the law," the Cabala as " the soul of the soul of the law." " It was
" delivered to Moses," say the Hebrew doctors,
" by the Divine Author of the law, who not
" only favoured him with the oral explanation
" of the law, or Mishna, but also added a mys-
" tical interpretation of it, to be transmitted, like
" the Mishna, by tradition, to posterity. The

LECT. III. " Mishna," say they, " explains the manner in " which the rites and ceremonies of the law are " to be performed; but the Cabala teaches the " mysteries couched under those rites and cere- " monies, and which are everywhere hidden in " the words and even in the letters of the Scrip- " tures. They divide this mystical science into " thirteen different species; and by various trans- " positions, abbreviations, permutations, combi- " nations, and separations of words; and from " the figures, and numerical powers of letters; " imagine the law sufficient to instruct the " Cabalistic adept in every art and science."

It is scarcely necessary to remark, that little respect is due to the accounts given by the Jews, as to the antiquity and origin of these productions. Their contents furnish satisfactory evidence on these points. In all these works we find that mixture of the doctrines of the Hebrew prophets, with the speculations of the Alexandrian philosophy, which we have already described. While purporting to be no more than the assistants or interpreters of the inspired writings, they were the most fitting instruments that could have been devised with a view to the obscuring of revealed wisdom; so that the Jew, disposed *to make void the law of God through the tradition*, might only need avail himself of these spurious authorities, and his object would be accomplished. It will be proper to add, that the Cabalistic doctrines, from their relation to

abstruse matters, were the *mysteries* of corrupted Judaism, being fully disclosed to the initiated only.* LECT. III.

It followed from these causes, that the Jews, both in their own country and in other lands, were divided into two classes; the one adopting the Mishnical and Talmudical commentaries on the divine law, and the mystical renderings of the whole in the Cabala; the other adhering to the more literal interpretation of the sacred text, and asserting its complete and exclusive authority.

From the former class, whose system tended so directly to neutralize the whole meaning and authority of revelation, nothing good was to be expected with reference to Christianity; and the Sadducees.

* Brucker, Hist. Philos. II. 822—845. Lardner's Jewish Testimonies, c. v. Reasons of the Law of Moses, from the "More Nevochim" of Maimonides, with Notes and Dissertations, by James Townley, D.D. 8vo. 1827. Dissertation I. Mosheim, De Rebus Christianorum, c. ii. sect. 5—8, 17, 18, 20. Seculum Secundum, sect. 53. Buddeus, Introductio ad Historiam Philosophiæ Hebreorum. Philo protested strongly against any symbolizing with the mysteries of heathenism in the explanations of the Mosaic doctrines and institutes. (De Victim. Offerent. 56.) But the very form of his protest indicates that the corruption was in progress; and his own double method of interpreting Scripture—now to the sense-led multitude, and now to the intellectual—included the theory on which the mysteries were all professedly founded, and which began to produce, even in his time, that formalism on the one hand, and ascetism on the other, which became so prevalent among the Christians of a later age.—De Migrat. Abraham, 402.

LECT. III. zeal of the latter, as evinced in the SADDUCEES, who probably formed the greater number of its adherents, was far from being of the most ingenuous description. It does not appear that this sect disputed the authority of the prophets, admitting that of Moses only, as is sometimes affirmed. But it is too evident, that in opposing the pernicious system of the Talmudists and Cabalists, they fell into errors not less injurious on the other side. On their part, it was not enough to assail the impious assumption, which declared the highest dignity of the future to be no more than the equitable reward of certain works of supererogation performed by the persons obtaining it, but they proceeded to deny the future existence of the soul in the most absolute terms; affirming that it perished with the body; and treating the resurrection of the dead as a popular delusion. It was also a leading tenet of this sect, that men possess in themselves the full power, not only of choosing, but of performing either good or evil. And it was but consistent with their notions of futurity that they should regard the sanctions of the Old Testament as relating so exclusively to the present life, that the virtuous might be commonly known by their worldly prosperity, and the vicious by their misfortunes.

The violence which must have been done to the general language of the prophets, and to all the principles of mental integrity in treating of

that language, before men could bring themselves to the avowal of such dogmas, must be evident at a glance. It is supposed that the earlier doctrine of the Sadducees was not so far repugnant to inspired truth. But when the Redeemer conversed with them, they were the men we have now described. The members of such a sect, would, as a matter of course, be chiefly from among the opulent and the prosperous; and they could not, on principle, be very indulgent toward persons in opposite circumstances. So corrupt, however, had the religion of David, and Asaph, and Enoch, become, that the honours, not only of the magistracy, but even of the high-priesthood itself, were frequently conferred on men of this character! *

Karaïtes.

With the Sadducees we have to mention another, and a much more interesting sect, as no less distinguished by their opposition to the authority claimed in behalf of the traditions of their brethren;—we mean the KARÆITES. This name, which simply denotes a textuary, or

* Brucker, Hist. Philos. II. 715—730. Mosheim, De Rebus Christianorum, c. ii. sect. 12. Philo complains of some of his countrymen, as adopting a more open profession of infidelity than that of the Sadducees;—men who deserting the innocent customs of their country, became violators of the law under which they were born, and, through a vain prejudice in favour of the new, became lost to a proper reverence of the old. De Vita Mosis, I. 607. De Confus. Ling. 320. De Nom. Mutat. 1053. Philo's fondness for allegory was induced in part by a wish to meet the objections of these scoffers at the pretensions of Holy Writ.

LECT. III. scripturalist, distinguished a class of persons who were as much opposed to the irreligious sentiments of the Sadducees, as to the false authorities, and the wretched superstitions, so eagerly maintained by their antagonists. Both sects became known about the same time, and were effects from the same causes. But while the zeal of the one assumed the shape of the most complete worldliness and scepticism, that of the other retained something of the spirit of Old Testament piety. This pleasing fact will in part account for the preservation of the Karæite sect, amid the many revolutions of the last two thousand years, and for the enmity with which they have been every where regarded by their more apostate brethren. Their number has never been such as to produce any great impression on the Jewish character. But among a people in whose history there is so fearful a declension from every semblance of intelligent devotion, it is pleasing to discover the feeblest indication of spiritual life. It may be presumed that the maxims of the Karæites were serviceable to the progress of the gospel in the apostolic age; and it is not altogether without reason that these men have been designated the Protestants of Judaism.*

* Brucker, Hist. Philos. II. 730—743. Dr. Henderson, in his volume of "Travels in Russia," has furnished an interesting account of a settlement of Karaite Jews, visited by him at *Djuful Kalè*, or the Jews' Fort, in the Crimea.

These sects, so much at issue in their general character, but agreed in their zeal for the exclusive authority and literal interpretation of the Mosaic law, found their common antagonist in the PHARISEES. This body rose gradually into notice amid the altered circumstances of the Jewish people subsequent to the Babylonish captivity and the age of Alexander. When the Saviour appeared, they had been the ruling party in Jerusalem, with little exception, for many generations. Their peculiarities are sufficiently known from the pages of the New Testament. Hence it is scarcely requisite to observe, that their system was so devised as to secure the reputation of extraordinary sanctity, while excluding nearly all just conception of the Divine Nature, and every proper sense of religious obligation. Its prime artifice was to convert an ostentatious and uncommanded austerity, into a sort of license for unholy indulgence; and the traditions and mysticism of which we have spoken, were among the principal means employed in accomplishing this object. The value which the Pharisees attached to their austerities, and the influence assigned to their supposed works of supererogation on the decisions of the

(c. xiv.) I cannot but recommend the whole volume to my readers, as combining the usual interest of a book of travels with much biblical information. The Karaite Jews, it appears, have commentaries on the whole of the Scriptures.—Quarterly Review, IV. 141, 142; XXXV. 378.

LECT. III. Divine tribunal, could only have proceeded from the grossest ignorance as to the nature of the religion which had been taught and exemplified by many of their devout forefathers. Among these religionists some differences of opinion and practice obtained, but none that were not in agreement with this general character. Their distinction consisted in attaching to the evil of many spiritual vices, the superadded guilt of an attempt to conceal them under a veil of high spiritual pretension. It was this, especially, which exposed them to the thunders of His displeasure, who came to enjoin, by precept and example, the worship of the Father *in spirit and in truth.**

Essenes. The only remaining class of Jews, whose religious profession would appear to have influenced the character of primitive Christianity were the Essenes—a sect distinguished in many things from each of the preceding. It has been conjectured, and with much probability, that the fraternities bearing this name owed their origin to the devout feeling of certain Hebrew exiles, who, at the time of the Babylonish captivity, took refuge in Egypt;—the more favourable circumstances of their brethren in Alexandria, at a later period, being insufficient to induce them to forego the life of seclusion and self-denial to which they had been long accustomed. It is

* Brucker, Hist. Philos. II. 744—765. Mosheim, De Rebus Christianorum, c. ii. sect. 11.

well known, that at the commencement of the christian era they had existed in their separate state, mostly in Egypt, through nearly two centuries; and that toward the close of that interval, they had spread themselves in parts of Judea.

This sect, it should be observed, consisted of two classes, called the *practical* and the *theoretical;* the latter carrying their ascetic notions to a much greater extent than the former. The corrupt state of Judaism with both parties may be inferred from the fact, that there have not been wanting learned men who have failed to see any thing in the opinions or customs of either to indicate a Hebrew origin. And it must be confessed, that while their Jewish extraction is affirmed most decidedly both by Philo and Josephus, their religious sentiments, and their manner of life, are derived from the oriental philosophy in a much greater degree than from the school of Moses. Thus their maxims led them to adopt a strict community of goods; to attach an extraordinary virtue to celibacy; to abound in minute observances as to food, apparel, oblations, and religious exercises generally; in some instances separating themselves from all secular occupations, and restricting their intercourse even with each other so as to render their seclusion hardly a remove from that of the hermit. They appear to have honoured the sun as the visible emblem

LECT. III. of the Deity, regulating much of their conduct by the times of his rising and setting. In attempting to reconcile this practice, and others, with the injunctions of Moses, they would greatly need the help of that mystical and allegorical method of interpreting Scripture to which they were so much attached. By these aids, however, some of their number even aspired to the gift of prophecy. What was meant by rendering every novitiate a sworn guardian "of the names of the angels," we can only know by remembering the magical signification connected with such expressions, as occurring in that philosophy by which these devotees had been spoiled.*

Amid these sectarian differences, which, at the period of the Advent, had so far separated the Jewish people from each other; and which, with so little exception, bespoke their estrangement from the enlightened devotion which had distinguished so many of their remote ancestors, it is not easy to determine what their prevailing expectations were with respect to the character and the mission of the promised Messiah. It is but too manifest, that the splendour of that military ascendancy to which they had been subject from the age of Alexander, had produced

* Brucker, Hist. Philos. II. 765—779. Mosheim, De Rebus Christianorum, c. ii. sect. 13—15. See some valuable remarks in Neander (I. 39, 40.) on the comparative testimonies of Philo and Josephus to the character of the Essenes.

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an undue estimate of military glory; disposing them to anticipate in the Son of David a deliverer of their country from its tributary state, and a leader, who should not only bring back their independence as a people, but raise them to the kind of greatness which had so long fascinated them as the proud distinction of their oppressors. As these fond anticipations obtained, and it is evident they did obtain with the mass of the people both in Judea and through the world, there would be induced a tendency to look toward the coming Saviour as being no more than man; possessed, indeed, of transcendent powers, but distinguished mainly as a worldly conqueror, and as a sovereign in whom the Jew would find equal beneficence and power.

A few remained, even to the last, who *waited for the consolation of Israel*, as spoken of by the prophets. And though the views entertained by this small remnant partook necessarily of much obscurity, and of some inconsistency, and were, perhaps, considerably different from each other, there was a spirituality, and a real greatness of sentiment, characterizing their impressions on this vital question, which has ever caused them to appear, in the retrospects of devout men, as *lights shining in a dark place*.*

* Mosheim, De Rebus Christianorum, c. ii. sect. 8. Dr. Smith's Scripture Testimony, I. 623. Sumner on the Evidence of Christianity derived from its Nature and Reception, c. ii.

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Parallel between the corruption of Christianity and of Judaism.

There are many important lessons suggested in relation to our subject, by this brief review of the state of Judaism at the time when Christianity was first published and when it had made some progress in the world. It is worthy of special observation, that we have not noticed a single corruption of Judaism, which has not its strict parallel in the history of Christianity. What human nature has done under the present dispensation, is precisely what it did under the preceding. It is not only the same depravity which is seen under the two economies, but the same depravity availing itself of the same means, and manifesting itself in the same forms.

The history of the christian church has made us conversant with men, who, while admitting the authority of the New Testament as a divine revelation, have laboured to exclude from its pages the very doctrines which it was particularly designed to make known, and on which it depends for all its adaptation to mankind in their present fallen condition. Thus did the Sadducees profess submission to the authority of Moses and the prophets, and, at the same time, so explained their language as to deprive their message of nearly all fitness and value. In both instances, the same kind of result appears to have proceeded, but too generally, from the same causes. Among these causes we may notice a rash and presumptuous tendency of mind, fostered so as to beget a love of the daring and

eccentric; together with a supercilious estimate of whatever may happen to be in favour with the multitude. Added to these was a spirit of worldliness, disposing its victims to bring down the standard of scriptural requirement to the level of those very moderate compliances with which human nature is generally satisfied in matters of religion. Nothing could be more acceptable to a state of intellect inclining toward temerity, to men beset with selfish passions and strongly bent on present indulgence, than the system of the Sadducees. The extent in which dispositions of this nature may have contributed to the formation of some later systems of theology of similar texture, and bearing the christian name, I do not pretend to determine; nor shall I attempt to ascertain how much more of religious or moral restraint has been imposed by such systems on the parties embracing them. It must suffice to observe, that from the history of the Sadducees, it is obvious, that nothing of astonishment should be felt, if even bodies of men are found, who, while professing to acknowledge the authority of the documents of Scripture, reject nearly the whole of its truths.

But it is not the corruption of Christianity in the way of direct and unsparing mutilation alone, as seen in the class of professors just noticed, which has its precursor and model in the fallen state of Judaism. The disposition of mankind

LECT. III. has commonly been rather to neutralize the bearing of divine truth, to soften its meaning, or to make unauthorized and injurious additions to it, than openly and formally to discard it. Thus, on the part of myriads, in every age, the name of Christianity has been retained, and an open profession of it has been made, while the spiritual character which it was framed to produce has been wholly wanting. Zealots in the cause of a Christianity fashioned to their pleasure, but strangers to that godliness which *the truth as it is in Jesus* was intended to create and perfect. To this pass did the ancient Pharisees bring the religion of Moses, boasting of being Abraham's seed while in the bonds of iniquity; affirming the inspired record to be invaluable, but negligent of the piety which alone gave to it its value:—holding the truth, but holding it so loosely, or so perversely, as to hold it in unrighteousness. In short, there is scarcely any thing in the corruptions of the doctrine, the morals, the polity, or the worship of the christian church, which may not be seen, and in as large a development as circumstances would permit, in the religion of the Jews at the time to which our attention is now directed. The offices of religion had long ceased to be associated with any idea of sanctity on the part of the men who aspired to them; — the high-priesthood itself, being an object of purely political ambition, and, in consequence, frequently obtained by some of

the most wicked of mankind. As the claims resting on personal character were necessarily diminished, those presumed to be inherent in the priestly office were obtruded and magnified;—and what with the vices of the priesthood, and the authority of their traditions, and the degeneracy of the people, the chief effect of the religion which was allowed to subsist, was to give a kind of religious sanction to the general depravity.

Thus Judaism was, what Christianity too soon began to be, an invention of man, more than the work of God. The former, in common with the latter, had its pontiffs and its conclaves; its maxims of intolerance, and its subordination of moral to ecclesiastical obedience; its encouragements to mental reservation, and its preference of the law of tradition to the law of the Bible; its substitution of a corrupt, or at best of a merely symbolic ritual, in the place of enlightened piety; and of presumptuous or idle speculation in the place of religious truth. And with all its worldly pomp and splendour, it was not without its attractions for the learned recluse, its instances of voluntary poverty, its sects of ostentatious devotees;—in a word, it possessed nearly all that shrewd fitness to the different temperaments, and characters, and classes of men, which has contributed so much to the success and the permanence of the grand apostasy, being in all respects as popish as popery has ever

LECT. III. been, in connexion with the same limited means of self-advancement.

Evidence of the Authenticity of the New Testament from this source.

There is much also in this coincidence, painful as it is, bespeaking the certain truth of the communications made to us in Scripture. The state of things which the several writers whose works compose the New Testament have described, and evidently without the least compact or collusion, is proved to be a strictly natural state of things. Human nature, as introduced by them, acts consistently with itself, as demonstrated by its subsequent history in similar circumstances. It is generally confessed, that to view the original and perfect character of the Redeemer as an invention of such men as the evangelists, is to adopt a conclusion fraught with greater difficulty than is involved in the largest claim ever urged in behalf of the Son of God. And the same reasoning is equally applicable to the fact on which I have now remarked. A picture of human nature so varied, so profound, so complete, so true, and withal so simple and veracious in its colouring, could never have been the production of such artists, except as copied from the life, and as they were aided by that *power from on high* which we know was vouchsafed to them.

Nor must we conclude without observing, from the subject of this Lecture, how small a deference is due to Jewish opinions even with respect to the import of Old Testament Scripture. When the creed of this degenerate

people happens to be in favour of any heterodox opinion, nothing is more common than the seemingly triumphant appeal: — "Surely the Jews must have been the best judges as to the meaning of their own Scriptures." Yes, they were, when they conspired as a people to crucify the Lord of life and glory; and when their rulers—too faithful a reflection of themselves—commanded the disciples of the promised Deliverer, that *they should speak no more in his name!* To him *bare all the prophets witness;* and it is to the men who destroyed him with cruel hatred that we are directed as to the best interpreters of the language of the prophets! We affirm that it is not less unreasonable to look to the opinions of such men as an exposition of pure Judaism, than it would be to take the decrees of councils and conclaves in the tenth century as an exposition of pure Christianity. We dream not of confiding in an Hildebrand, or an Innocent the third, as safe expositors of any thing christian. But it were quite as reasonable so to do as to look to men like Ananias or Caiaphas for the just interpretation of anything pertaining to the creed or the character of such as were Israelites indeed. Better were it that we go to the cells of monasteries in search of genuine Christianity, than to seek after the true indications of Hebrew piety in the walks of pharisaic pride. And much better were it to search for the pure elements of the New

LECT. III. Testament in the pages of the most artificial and benighted of the schoolmen, than to look for those of the Old Testament in the works of the most guileless and enlightened of the Rabbis. Nothing therefore can be more disingenuous (I might use a stronger term) than that men should take their stand amid the corruptions of Judaism, and deem it quite enough, in order to effect an admixture of those corruptions with Christianity, that they scornfully repeat the idle saying—"Surely the Jews must have known the meaning of their own Scriptures!" No extraordinary influence is required to enable us to judge correctly on this point; nothing beyond the exercise of common discernment and integrity. And when the disputants adverted to shall have shown themselves incapable of distinguishing between such topics as the nature of monarchy and the perverseness of despotism, or between the philanthropy of the most popular principles of legislation, and the excesses of individual selfishness,—then, and not till then, may we regard them as faultless, in not perceiving the contrast between the religion delineated *in the Psalms and the Prophets*, and that of the men *who slew the Holy One and the Just!*

Hence, as we are not much surprised on finding that Protestant Christianity did not at once exhibit the unsullied purity of its divine original,—much of the error which characterized

the popish ascendency being still everywhere interwoven with it,—neither should it be matter of wonder if we find converts from the depraved state of Judaism we have been contemplating, betraying a proneness to blend some of their hereditary prepossessions with their profession of the gospel.

" With the greater part of the Jewish people," says Neander, " the most serious obstacles to " their capability of receiving the gospel arose " from their carnal disposition, which was anxious " to use the heavenly as a means of obtaining " the earthly, from the want of an heartfelt " thirst for moral and religious things, and from " their reliance on their unalienable birthright, " as the children of Abraham according to the " flesh, and on the merit and sanctifying power " of their ceremonial law. It might easily " happen, that where men of this cast, moved by " some momentary impressions, embraced Chris- " tianity, they should err again in their faith, " and fall away again from Christianity, because " they did not find their carnal expectations " instantly realized. And even if they remained " outwardly Christians, that they should conceive " Christianity itself in a carnal manner, mixing " it up with all their Jewish imaginations."*

The manner and the extent in which Judaism was allowed, from these causes, to operate as the means of corrupting Christianity, both in the

* History of the Christian Religion, I. 54.

LECT. III. instance of Jews and Gentiles, will be the subject of our next Lecture. In the mean time, let the devout mind review the forms of error which have now passed before us, and learn to guard against their approaches under some slight difference of modification or of name.

LECTURE IV.

ON THE CORRUPTION OF CHRISTIANITY FROM MISAPPREHENSIONS OF JUDAISM.

LECTURE IV.

ROM. IX. 6.

They are not all Israel which are of Israel.

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The application of the preceding Lecture to the present.

It has appeared, in the preceding Lecture, that the state of Judaism at the commencement of the christian era, was adapted rather to perpetuate the depraved tendencies of human nature than to subdue them; that it was the creature, rather than the regenerator, of the people professing themselves its adherents. It follows, that such persons, on becoming Christians, would have nearly every thing to learn, and much to unlearn. Judaism, in its purity, would have been, as it was meant to be, admirably preparative to a reception of the gospel. But in its corrupt state, the points which it retained in common with Christianity were few, and almost ineffective, compared with those by which the type was found to be at issue with its antitype. Instead of being altogether preliminary to the perfect economy by which it was to be superseded, it became, in most respects, strikingly repugnant to it.

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This leading fact should be constantly borne in mind when looking to the Christianity of Jewish converts. We expect that all men who truly embrace the gospel will be found holding the substance of its doctrine, and evincing, in some degree, its newness of life. But we also expect that error and imperfection will attach, more or less, to the most sincere; and that the nature of these remaining misconceptions and deficiencies will be determined by the nature of those opinions and circumstances by which the persons commencing a profession of Christianity may have been previously influenced. Accordingly, the hazard to which the purity of the gospel will be exposed among converted Jews, must be from admixtures of Judaism, and of Judaism corrupted as we find it in the apostolic age.

A material fact connected with the early progress of Christianity.

There is a circumstance, moreover, in the early history of the apostles, which, though little considered, is in itself sufficient to account for many of those mistakes as to the spirit and requisitions of the gospel which were so soon observable among the primitive believers. For reasons which, no doubt, were abundantly proper, the apostles appear to have confined their labours within the limits of Judea until at least twelve years subsequent to our Lord's ascension. And it was not until some two years later, that Paul commenced his travels as a preacher of the gospel to the Gentiles. During these years,

however, the gospel had spread itself through many distant provinces of the Roman empire; and being destitute, in such places, of any immediate apostolic superintendence, it was but feebly protected against the injuries which threatened it, not only from Jewish prejudice, but from a tendency in the age, which was every where disposing men to employ themselves in forming new systems made up of selections from the most discordant sources.

The persons instrumental in this diffusion of Christianity, were principally among such as came in contact with it by their visits at Jerusalem; and such others as were driven from that city by the hand of persecution, particularly on the death of Stephen. And it must be observed, that it was not until the Christianity so propagated had been acted upon for nearly twenty years by the many foreboding circumstances we have named, that the first of the apostolic epistles was written. An extended space, therefore, presents itself, subsequent to the day of Pentecost, in which the professors of the gospel were almost exclusively Jews, and Jews who were in particular danger of error from the want of that immediate apostolic authority which was so long restricted to Jerusalem and to the parts nearly adjacent. Many, probably the larger portion, of the errors so frequently noticed in the apostolic epistles owe their origin to this interval, and to those peculiar circum-

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stances in which the foreign Jews professing Christianity were at that time placed. Nor should it be overlooked, in relation to this point, that long after the gospel was preached openly to the Gentiles, it continued to be the practice of the apostles, in every city, to make their first appeal to the resident Jews, preaching in their synagogues.*

Another fact explanatory of the early difference of opinion and usage among Christians.

Another circumstance which conduced to render the appearance of dissension among the early converts of the gospel almost unavoidable, was the seeming abruptness of the mode in which they had been recognized as Christians. Nothing was demanded of either Jew or Gentile preparatory to baptism, and the christian fellow-

* Dr. Burton's Inquiry into the Heresies of the Apostolic Age, pp. 13—25. Lardner's Jewish Testimonies, c. i. Mosheim, De Rebus Christianorum, Seculum Primum, sect. 13. It was believed, in the second century, that the apostles remained at Jerusalem twelve years, in obedience to a command of their Lord (Euseb. Hist. Eccles. Lib. V. c. xviii. Clemens Alexandr. Stromat. Lib. VI. c. v. p. 762); and Mosheim has perceived an important end to be answered by the arrangement. "The great interest of Christianity re-" quired that those whom our blessed Saviour had appointed " the judges, or, as we ought, perhaps, rather to say, the " arbiters of divine matters, and to whom he had given the " power of regulating and determining every thing relative to " the establishing of his religion, should for a certain time " remain together in one place, that so an easy access might " be had by those who were likely to stand in need of their " advice or assistance; and their decrees possess an addi-" tional authority from its being known that they comprised " the sentiments, not of one or two, but of the whole."— De Rebus Christ. *ubi supra*.

ship, beyond an open profession of faith in Christ as the promised Saviour of men, and an avowed willingness to be governed in all things by his holy commandments. But it must be obvious, that where these simple requisitions were most ingenuously complied with, the religious knowledge possessed would often be of the most elementary description, while much error would remain to be discarded, and many a false impression to be effaced. LECT. IV.

It is true, the circumstances under which these professions were made, were such as to afford a much better test of sincerity than could have been supplied by the most systematic scrutiny. But mere sincerity is compatible with a very imperfect state both of knowledge and of feeling; and in these societies, composed of persons differing so widely in habits and prejudices, and where the oldest must still have been comparatively a novice, the degrees of mutual concession would not be always adjusted so amicably as the more intelligent might desire. There was not only the broad line made up of the differences between the Jew and the Gentile, but many lesser points on which the Hebrew converts would be at issue among themselves, all demanding the presence of a competent and a wisely exercised authority. When the primitive churches had been for some time established, and the presence of inspired teachers began to be withdrawn, the practice of admitting men to

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the christian fellowship on a bare profession of faith became less frequent. In the formation, however, of those churches, the apostles evidently deemed it proper, that all persons making a credible avowal of their belief in the Lord Jesus Christ, should be received as believers. Time was left to distinguish between the sincere and the pretending, the deceiver or the deceived; and all the difficulties likely to arise from such a course were viewed as amply provided for in the acknowledged laws of christian discipline, which would always require the expulsion of the unworthy.

Disputes relative to the obligation of the ceremonial law, and their connexion with the corruption of christian doctrine.

I. Every attentive reader of the New Testament must have observed the excessive and ill-directed attachment of the Jews to the law of Moses. It must be obvious also, that the causes which produced this state of mind with regard to the Mosaic ritual, were precisely those which tended to veil the true doctrine of the Jewish lawgiver from the men professing to be his disciples. Hence there was much room to fear, that an obstinate adherence to the more imposing ceremonies of the law, would prove a source of corruption to the simple and partially defined institutions of the gospel. The same room for apprehension was there, lest the misconceptions which had so long prevailed as to the general design of the legal economy, should be found no less injurious to the purity of the christian doctrine. The whole of that dispensation was

clearly temporary and preliminary, its commemorative usages, in common with the rest, being *shadows of good things to come, the substance of which is Christ.* Hence, no man could affirm the perpetual obligation of the ceremonial law, without betraying serious ignorance as to the distinct and real character of the two economies. There was, in this way, a strictly natural connexion between the disputes which related to the perpetuity of the law, and those which had respect to the means of justification. LECT. IV.

At Rome, in Galatia, and in other places, Jewish teachers were found, who not only contended for the strict observance of the ancient ritual, but insisted on such observances, as constituting, in an important degree, the ground of a sinner's acceptance at the tribunal of his Maker. This righteousness of the law, together with that amount of moral and religious excellence which every man was presumed to be capable of reaching, was thought to confer a kind of title to the happiness of the future. It is not necessary I should remind you of the manner in which the apostle of the Gentiles has exposed the repugnance of all such tenets to the doctrines of the gospel. You know that the existence of any such persuasion was the effect, in his view, of most inadequate and mistaken conceptions both as to the present condition of human

LECT. IV. nature, and the great object of the Redeemer's incarnation.*

Cerinthus—his doctrine.

It was the apostle that laboured more than his brethren to counteract this course of things who said that *evil men and seducers wax worse and worse; deceivers and being deceived.* In many, whose manner it was thus to resist, or neutralize every provision of celestial mercy, this picture of the natural and the retributive effect of such perverseness was awfully realized. Not to mention Simon Magus,—who, as a Samaritan, was partly of Hebrew extraction, and who is denounced by so many ecclesiastical writers as the parent of nearly all the heresies in the primitive church,—there was Cerinthus, an heresiarch, whose followers appear, in common with himself, to have erred alike in what they professed to receive and in what they opposed, always either corrupting the truth or rejecting it. It is certain that Cerinthus was a Jew, and that he encouraged an observance of the Mosaic ceremonies among his followers. It also appears, that he regarded the world as created by angels, and not by the Almighty; and that he distinguished himself as the preacher of a millennium, holding out among the rewards to be obtained by his disciples, a state of physical existence and enjoyment on the earth during a thousand years.

* Mosheim, De Rebus Christianorum, Seculum Primum, sect. 55—59.

He taught, moreover, that Jesus was the son of Joseph and Mary in the ordinary course of nature, and no more; but that a superior nature, an emanation from the Deity, to which the name of Christ was exclusively appropriate, descended on him at his baptism, and remained with him until a little before his crucifixion. According to Cerinthus, Jesus of Nazareth was a partaker of true and proper humanity; and, as the dwelling-place of the Christ, was raised somewhat above humanity. His sole office, however, even when thus endowed, was that of a divinely qualified teacher. The manners of this pretended Christian are reported to have been as defective as his creed. But depraved as human nature is, the marked success of a sectary, is a strong presumption in favour of the general propriety of his deportment; and the disciples of Cerinthus appear, more or less frequently, through several centuries.* LECT. IV.

The Ebionites.

It is probable that Cerinthus had become known as the advocate of his peculiar tenets before the decease of the last of the apostles. The Ebionites, a sect consisting rather of apostate Jews than of Christians, embraced most of the dogmas of Cerinthus, and made their appearance

* Lardner, VIII. 404—417. Mosheim, De Reb. Christ. Seculum Primum, sect. 70. Ittigius, De Hæresiarchis Ævi Apostolici, &c., sect. i. c. iv. v. Beausobre's Histoire Critique de Manichée et du Manichéisme, Lib. I. c. iii. Histoire Critique des Dogmes, &c. Lib. II. c. iv. Tillemont, Histoire Eccles. II. 35—42, 54—59.

LECT. IV. about the middle of the second century. Their name is from a Hebrew word, denoting a beggar, or a state of the meanest poverty; and it is generally supposed to have been that of their founder, or of some distinguished teacher among them. There are some writers, however, who consider it as having been adopted to describe the state of voluntary poverty which obtained among the first Jewish Christians, or as indicating the humble condition observable in the class of persons who from among that people professed themselves Christians. The fathers of the church speak of the designation as singularly appropriate, if used to describe the *tenets* of the persons to whom it is applied,—the creed of the Ebionites being remarkable for its poverty of conception in relation to every thing christian.

Mention, indeed, is made of two classes of Ebionites; but their principal difference appears to have been, that the one admitted the miraculous conception, while the other rejected it. It is more important to remember, that these persons have been frequently eulogized in modern times as being almost the only disciples of a pure Christianity in their day; and, in connexion with this view of their character, it will be proper to observe their manner of proceeding with respect to the authority of Scripture. There is reason to believe, that the only documents received by them, as of strict religious authority, were the Pentateuch of the Old Testament, and the

Gospel by Matthew in the New, and that these were considerably mutilated. Their invincible attachment to the law, taught them to abhor the pretensions of St. Paul. Nor was this enough; they assailed his reputation with the grossest calumnies. Epiphanius is a writer often appealed to by the modern advocates of the Ebionite creed, as "a most respectable authority"* on such questions; and according to Epiphanius, these true descendants of the primitive confessors at Jerusalem were wont to describe the Apostle Paul as originally a Greek proselyte, and as having become an apostle of Christianity in a fit of resentment, on being refused the hand of the high-priest's daughter in marriage.† It is true, Epiphanius is a writer of the fourth century, but it is not true that this account depends, as some whom it has perplexed have affirmed, on his authority alone. Methodius, who lived a century earlier, bears a similar testimony.‡ Nor is it a feeble confirmation which is given to these depositions, by the fact, that there is not the

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* Dr. Priestley's History of Early Opinions concerning Jesus Christ, III. 180. It is true the Doctor can depreciate the authority on one occasion which he has extolled on another (pp. 205, 206), a difference which takes place as the matter deposed happens to be agreeable or otherwise.

† Opera, Adversus Hæreses, Lib. I. tom. ii. sect. 30, pp. 125. 140. 162. Ed. Coloniæ, 1682.

‡ Dr. Priestley's Early Opinions. III. 217. Sympos. p. 113. Ed. 1672. cited by Dr. Burton, in his Inquiry into the Heresies of the Apostolic Age, p. 500.

LECT. IV. slightest evidence in all ecclesiastical antiquity that these pseudo-christians ever professed to look on Jesus Christ as the Messiah foretold by the prophets.* What space was necessary to bring the impiety of the Ebionites to this low grade we are not required to determine; but that a community capable of tolerating such opinions in any portion of its members, should not only be recognized as christian, but exhibited as a kind of model of christian excellence, is surely something extraordinary.†

Testimony of Justin Martyr to the orthodoxy of Jewish converts.

The sacred historian informs us, that from the beginning there were *many thousands of Jews who believed, and that all were zealous of the law*.‡ We learn also, from the language of the orthodox Justin Martyr, that there were Jews in his time who were properly successors of those earlier converts; men whom he viewed as partakers of the same faith with himself, and as participants, notwithstanding their Judaical observances, in the christian salvation.§ Could Justin possibly so have spoken of these believing Hebrews, if he had regarded them as believing only in the simple humanity of the Saviour, and as looking for some other deliverer as the promised Messiah? The only reasonable conclusion

* Dr. Burton's Inquiry, pp. 505. 515.

† Mosheim, De Rebus Christ. Seculum Secundum, sect. 38—40. Ittigius, De Hæresiarchis Ævi Apost. Sect. I. c. vi.

‡ Acts xxi. 20.

§ Dial. cum Tryphone, p. 142.

in this respect is, that Justin regarded the orthodox creed as embraced by converts from Judaism, in common with the Gentiles.

Unitarian theory concerning the origin and character of the Ebionites.

Those who insist that the Ebionites are the true and only representatives of the first Jewish believers, endeavour to vindicate their hypothesis on the following grounds. In the first place, it is contended, that the Gnostics are the only persons calling themselves Christians, who are censured as heretics by the earlier ecclesiastical writers; and, on this assumption, it is further assumed, that certainly the Ebionites were not Gnostics. In the next place, it is maintained, that the Nazarenes, and the Jewish Christians generally, were the same with the Ebionites; and that, in consequence, whatever is said implying the true Christianity of converts from Judaism, during the existence of the Ebionites, must also imply the true Christianity of the disciples of Ebion. It is in this manner that this doubtful progeny are made to be the offspring of the church at Jerusalem. A few words on the fallacy of this theory must suffice.

Its fallacy.

The influence of Gnosticism is intimately connected with the early history of the church; and it is certain that many of the expositions and cautions in the later Scriptures of the New Testament were directed against that pernicious heresy. One of its peculiarities was a rejection of the Jewish prophets, and a denial of the resurrection. It was also common with the

LECT. IV. Gnostics to distinguish between Jesus and Christ; the former designation being understood as referring to our Lord's humanity, the latter to the Eon, or celestial emanation, which became resident in his human nature from his baptism. Another Gnostic peculiarity was a denial of the miraculous conception. Now it is to be remembered, that all these opinions were professed by the Ebionites;* and if the paganized philosophy whence they were derived, contained other absurdities which this body cannot be shown to have acknowledged, there is enough in their education as Jews to serve as an explanation of such exceptions.

Testimony of Irenæus concerning the heresy of the Ebionites.

Accordingly, Irenæus, the disciple of Polycarp, in his great work against the heresies of his times, has repeatedly classed the Ebionites with the different sects of Gnostics, whose errors it was his great object to refute, affirming that the opinions of the sect so named, if persisted in, must be fatal to salvation. It is true, Dr. Priestley has denied that Irenæus has thus represented the case of the Ebionites, and insists that he merely describes them as a people who held some "vain" opinions, and of whom, in consequence, he had "some dislike."† But it should have been remembered, that the term *vain*, as applied to

* Epiphanius Adversus Hæreses,—Ebionei Hæresis. Dr. Burton's Inquiry, Note 83. Jamieson's Vindication of the Primitive Faith, II. 231—255.

† Early Opinions, III. c. 10.

the Ebionite doctrine, is the very term applied, and in this particular connexion, with reference to the nature of all the heresies which the writer enumerates, and which he is labouring to confute. The passage says nothing concerning the most impious speculations of the Gnostics, which it does not say concerning the tenets of Ebion.

Having described the creed of this heresiarch, as opposed alike to that of the Scriptures and of the church, and as conducting his disciples to perdition, it must appear strange, to the uninitiated in the arts of controversy, that Irenæus, of all men, should have been noticed as judging very leniently of the Ebionite heresy. But he shall speak for himself on this matter. Adverting to the Saviour, he says—"Those who affirm "that he is no more than man, begotten of "Joseph, persisting in the bondage of their "original disobedience, they perish, not receiving "the word of God the Father, nor liberty from "the Son: as he has said, *If the Son make you "free, ye shall be free indeed.* But being igno- "rant of Him, who, of a Virgin, is Emmanuel, "they are deprived of his gift, which is eternal "life: but not receiving the Word of incorrup- "tion (or the incorruptible Word) they continue "in mortal flesh, and are debtors to death, re- "jecting the antidote of life."*

* "Rursus autem qui nude tantum hominem eum dicunt "ex Joseph generatum, perseverantes in servitute pristinæ "inobedientiæ moriuntur, nondum commixtum Verbum Dei "Patris, neque per Filium percipientes libertatem, quemad-

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This extract alone is enough to show, that a more unauthorized appeal could not well have been made, than is that which has been made in this instance, and with so much confidence, by Dr. Priestley. Irenæus, in his many notices of the Ebionites, invariably describes them as heretics. He traces their origin, in common with that of the other heretical sects of whom he is treating, to Simon Magus. He speaks of them as one class of those offenders who receive but a few fragments of revelation, but who are nevertheless condemned by what they do receive. They are denounced also as men who are judged, or convicted of their errors, by every spiritual or true believer. And beside the passage we have just cited, which, if language has meaning, sets them forth as a people perishing in their perverse infidelity; there are others, in a subsequent part of the same work, to the same effect.*

" modum ipse ait: Si Filius vos manumisserit, verè liberi " eritis. Ignorantes autem eum, qui ex Virgine est Em- " manuel, privantur munere ejus, quod est vita eterna: non " recipientes autem Verbum incorruptionis, perseverant in " carne mortali, et sunt debitores mortis, antidotum vitæ non " accipientes."—Lib. III. c. 19.—not 21, as in Horsley and " Jamieson.

* " Tanta est autem circa evangelia hæc firmitas, ut et " ipsi heretici testimonium reddant eis, et ex ipsis egrediens " unusquisque eorum coneter suam confirmare doctrinam. " Ebeonei etenim, eo evangelio quod est secundum Mathæum, " solo utentes, ex illo ipso convincuntur non recte præsumentes " de Domino. Marcion autem id quod est secundum Lucam " circumcidens, ex his quæ adhuc servantur penes eum, " blasphemus in solum existentem Deum ostenditur."—

LECT. IV. Ebionites and Nazarenes—were they the same people?

The identity of the Ebionites with the people known in ecclesiastical history under the name of Nazarenes, is a point which has been largely discussed, and one on which there is still a difference of opinion. If the evidence of antiquity, in this particular, be only partially adduced, either conclusion which it may be intended to establish will appear highly probable; but taken entirely, and fairly, the amount of testimony on the side of a difference from the beginning, between the people to whom these different names were applied, will, I conceive, appear very much the strongest. The term Nazarene, however, though it certainly seems to have been always used to denote a sect distinct from the Ebionites, is never so used as to indicate that even the Nazarenes were regarded as properly orthodox. The writers who affirm that both these names were assigned to one and the same people, maintain also that the one people so designated consisted of the only Jewish professors of Christianity in early times; and that, in consequence, the Ebionites are the people so frequently alluded to by ancient writers as acknowledged Christians.*

Lib. III. c. xi. Similar passages occur in the first, third, fourth, and fifth books.

* Ittigius, De Hæresiarchis Ævi Apost. sect. i. c. vi. vii. Tillemont, Hist. Eccles. II. 104—110, 481, 486. The reader may find this topic largely discussed in Dr. Priestley's Early Opinions, III. 158—190, 201—219; Bishop Horsley's Tracts; Dr. Jamieson's Vindication of the Primitive Faith,

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Testimony of Hegesippus to the orthodoxy of Jewish converts.

But this theory is a mere assumption. The testimony of Hegesippus alone is enough to refute it. The person bearing this name was a Jewish convert, who wrote about the middle of the second century. That he was himself orthodox is evident from the manner in which his authority is introduced by Eusebius; and from the fact that he was in communion with the church at Rome while under the superintendence of three successive orthodox pastors—Anicetus, Soter, and Eleutherus.* Now according to Hegesippus, the church at Jerusalem continued sound in the faith, agreeably to his views of soundness, until the martyrdom of Symeon, which brings us down to the dispersion of the Christians resident in that city after its siege under Vespasian. In short, the persons intended by the fathers, when they speak of Hebrews professing Christianity, and who were really Christians, were neither the Ebionites nor the Nazarenes, but those orthodox Jewish converts who had constituted the church at Jerusalem,

Vol. II. B. V. c. v. sect. 2, 3; and in the notes to Dr. Burton's Inquiry, p. 514—519. All these writers plead for a distinction between the two sects. The last author, who is, perhaps, the best modern guide on the question, insists, that the fathers who distinguished between the Ebionites and Nazarenes, always speak of the latter as being in some shape heretics, in common with the former, and would thus annihilate the theory of Dr. Priestley by a different process from that adopted by Bishop Horsley and Dr. Jamieson.

† Irenæus, whose own orthodoxy is not questioned, testifies to that of these persons, Contra Hæreses, Lib. III. c. iii. iv.

who, on the final overthrow of that city under Adrian, were settled in Elia, a colony in its neighbourhood, and who, from that time, were gradually merged in the Gentile church.*

Celsus deemed the creed of the Jewish professors of Christianity orthodox.

It may be worthy of remark also, that it appears from the language of Celsus, as cited by Origen, that the Jewish professors of Christianity who were observers of the law—and such it is always confessed were the Ebionites and Nazarenes — were wholly unknown to that close observer of the manners of the Christians.† We attach the more importance to this view of things as indicated by Celsus, inasmuch as he wrote in the time of Adrian, and under the correction of his enemies.‡ The passage, I conceive, is decisive in showing that the Ebionites and Nazarenes had really no existence until a period subsequent to the age of Adrian; or it is at least a proof that these sects, so far from constituting the body of Jewish Christians, were a mere secession from that body, and one of the most insignificant description. That so much importance should seem, nevertheless, to have been attached to them in ecclesiastical history, is sufficiently explained by the fact, that the history of the church, as transmitted by the fathers, is much more the history of the corruptions of Christianity, than of Christianity itself.

* Euseb. Hist. Lib. IV. c. 8. 11. 21, 22, 23.

† Origen, contra Cels. Lib. II. 385, 386.

‡ Ibid, 327.

LECT. IV. In more recent times, other causes, equally adventitious, have served to perpetuate the undue prominence assigned to these pretended believers.

Other Judaizing sects in the early ages of the church.

There are other sects mentioned in the history of the early ages of the church, as the Elsesaites, the Marcosians, and the Sethians, whose opinions and practices were much influenced by their attachment to Judaism.* But these never became considerable. Nor does it comport with our present limits to dwell on the minute facts of history in this instance, or any other. What has been advanced in favour of the views we entertain with respect to the general character of the Hebrew professors of Christianity was, on many accounts, necessary. But even here, our object has been rather to indicate the *nature*, than to adduce the *amount* of evidence available on the subject.

Necessary effect of these corruptions.

From the notices which have descended to us with regard to the whole of these sects, it is evident, that the causes which produced the grossest corruptions of revealed truth among the Jews before the advent were in operation with that people, and with similar effect, subsequent to that event. By the daring impiety of these persons, especially of the Ebionites, all the distinguishing doctrines of Holy Writ were more or less discarded; and the scattered fragments of

* Lardner, II. 478. III. 194. VIII. 614—626, 428—478, 552—559.

truth that were retained, were subject to admixtures of error in the greatest degree repugnant to them. If true believers, whether Jews or Gentiles, did not become corrupters of the christian doctrine, even to the utmost, it was not because the times were too pure to have supplied the stimulus of example in such a course of proceeding. We have not the means of tracing the effect of the Ebionite creed on the faith of the heretical sects belonging to the first three centuries; but we may conclude, that in the multiplied productions of those disputants, which history informs us were once widely circulated, frequent appeal was made to the degree of sanction conferred on every speculative extravagance, by the doctrine of a class of persons who were the natural descendants of Abraham, and professors of Christianity. In recent times, precisely this use has been made of the little that may be known concerning the obscure sect adverted to; considerable learning, and not a little ingenuity having been employed, to call them forth as the preachers of heterodox opinion even to the men of our time;—so remote may be the ultimate influence of error!

Influence of corrupted Judaism on the heresy of Arius.

Arianism, so memorable in its effects on the affairs of the church and of the empire, does not attract the attention of the ecclesiastical historian until the errors of Ebion have ceased to exist,—except as included in the creed of the Gnostic sects, or in that of the disciples of

LECT. IV. Manes. It would not be difficult, however, to show that Arianism owed its origin, in no small measure, to Judaism as expounded by the Alexandrian Jews, and especially by their great representative, Philo. The mystical and elaborate effusions of that writer on the character of the *Logos*, were so far contradictory, that those regarding the Word as a person, or as a mere attribute —as a created, or uncreated nature—might have appealed to the authority of that great Hebrew Platonist with nearly equal confidence. History relates, that on the final destruction of Jerusalem the Jews filled up the measure of their fanaticism. Their Gentile conquerors never appeared to them so hateful; and Christians, both from the Jews and Gentiles, who all professed to see the fulfilment of prophecy, and particularly of the sayings of Jesus, in the fate of the holy city, were objects of special animosity. We have noticed, that long before this time causes had been at work among the Jewish people disposing them to anticipate a leader of armies in the person of their Messiah; and the consequence of this capital error was not only an oblivion of the true object of the Redeemer's mission, but a necessary blindness to his true dignity. This fallen tendency of the Jewish mind was evidently accelerated by the calamities which marked their disappearance as a nation; and of all the causes which served to confirm it, there was not one, perhaps, more considerable than was involved

in the reflection, that by maintaining this doctrine with regard to the character of their promised Deliverer, they placed themselves at direct issue with the body of professed Christians.

Arius, and his numerous disciples, were not strangers to the charge of having revived the errors of Ebion. But we may believe that the doctrine of the later heresiarch derived its form and its strength, almost exclusively, from the mixture of Platonic and oriental philosophy, which had long characterised the school of Alexandria, and particularly from the adventurous comments of Philo on the Hebrew Scriptures. Whatever the writings of that eminently popular author contained, that might have the appearance of being at all opposed to the proper deity of the Saviour, would, under these circumstances, be eagerly adopted by his infatuated brethren, and would have uses no less obvious with every heterodox disputant among the Gentiles. The kind of Unitarianism, which, from these causes, was so generally maintained by the Jews subsequent to the age of Adrian, could not but operate in favour of every similar creed among avowed Christians. "Surely the Jews must be the best interpreters of their own Scriptures," was then urged, as in modern times, and with as little consideration or ingenuousness.*

* Maimbourg's History of Arianism. Whitaker's Origin of Arianism. But both these writers must be read with caution.

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Connexion between corrupted Judaism and Mohammedanism.

That there was an intimate connexion between the later history of Judaism, and the rise and power of Mohammedanism, is unquestionable. The spirit of polytheism, which had produced such corrupt speculations and usages in the Greek church, was in direct opposition to the spirit and letter both of the Old Testament and the New. The inhabitants of Arabia, descendants of Ishmael, had never ceased to retain some traces of the revealed theism so conspicuous as the faith of the patriarchs. But in the seventh century the barbarism of the Arabians was extreme. In Mecca, their capital, not a single native could write or read. The Jews and Christians in their neighbourhood, were called the *people of the book*—books, or writing, being an element of civilization unknown among themselves. Such was the condition of society over the whole world at that period, that the escape of these untutored hordes from gross superstition, and from idolatry as the most natural form of it, was, we may almost say, impossible. Still the idolatry of the Arabians was blended strongly with Hebrew recollections, having a special reference to Ishmael their father, and to Abraham their greater progenitor. When Mohammed resolved on his enterprize as a religionist, there was much in the form which the theology of the Jews had long since assumed; much in the historical

The works of Philo (Ed. Mangey), and the narratives of Fleury, Tillemont, and Mosheim, furnish a better guidance.

associations of his country, and in the prepossessions and feelings of its people; and much, we may add, in the general corruption of the church and the world, favourable to his success. His own ignorance, indeed, (for even Mohammed could neither write nor read,) must have unfitted him for acting the part of a religious teacher, even among his unlettered countrymen, had he not obtained the assistance of a Hebrew scribe, by whose ingenuity all the authority of Judaism was made to subserve the pretensions of the new faith;—the religion of Mohammed being, according to its author and its votaries, the same in substance with that of the patriarchs and prophets. In short, if we credit this memorable impostor, we must suppose that true religion has been the same in its essence in every age; that in his day every division of mankind had contributed, each in their own way, to destroy its purity; and that upon him it devolved, as the divinely-appointed successor of every preceding messenger from the Eternal, to effect a renovation of the faith and character of mankind. It was his endeavour, as times and circumstances suggested, to conciliate all parties, Jews, Christians, Magians, and Idolaters; but the impress on his whole system, obvious on the slightest inspection, is that of Judaism, and of Judaism as mutilated and debased by the corruptions of centuries.* The Jew rejected Christianity as a

* History of Mohammedanism, by Charles Mills, c. i.

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fable, the Mohammedan would supersede it as imperfect; and both have contributed, in an eminent degree, to misrepresent and corrupt the genuine doctrines of revelation. Thus much, however, must suffice as to the influence of misconceptions of Judaism on the TRUTHS of Christianity. Our remaining space must be given to a brief review of its effect on the christian INSTITUTES.

Effect of Jewish misapprehension and prejudice on the Institutions of the New Testament.

II. When the gospel was first promulgated, an attachment to the religious usages of his nation had long been the ruling passion of the Jew. Even his subjection to a foreign power was felt comparatively little, so long as the services of the temple and of the synagogue remained free from the polluting touch of his heathen masters. It was in this direction, accordingly, that every Jew, on becoming a believer in the gospel, would find *the sin most easily besetting him.* To see the law in its proper relation to the gospel would be his great difficulty. And when it is remembered, that so considerable a space intervened subsequent to the day of Pentecost, during which the converts to Christianity were principally from among the Jews, and left in a great measure to their own guidance, it will be less a matter of surprise that many of the observances of the law were retained

v. vi. D'Herbelot, Bibliothéque Orientale, Tom. II. 648—657. Ed. 4to. 1777. Sale's Preliminary Discourse to his Translation of the Koran. Ockley's Hist. Saracens.

along with the profession which should have superseded them. LECT. IV.

Prevalence and strength of these prejudices.

On the propriety of some mixture of this sort, the Hebrew believers appear to have been of one mind. Even by the apostles, this prejudice seems to have been rather yielded to than resisted. But when the interval had passed which was to precede the general admission of the Gentiles, the question necessarily arose,—how far this new and rapidly increasing class of converts was to be viewed as bound by the *customs which Moses had established.* In the populous city of Antioch, where the Gentile converts were numerous, this matter occasioned so much perplexity, that it was deemed expedient to submit the question, in the most formal manner, to the judgment of the apostles, and of the church at Jerusalem. The result is very distinctly stated in the fifteenth chapter of the Acts. We are there told, that *it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to the apostles and brethren,* that the Gentiles should be required to abstain *from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication;* but that in all other respects the ceremonial law should be to them as no longer existing. There is, moreover, the strongest reason for believing, that even these restrictions had reference, not to the Gentiles as a body, but exclusively to those converts from heathenism who were called *devout Gentiles,* persons who had been

LECT. IV. Jewish proselytes before they became Christians.*

It is sufficiently plain that this decision had respect to the Gentiles only, leaving the Jews to a continuance in their much-loved observances. What is more, the apostles themselves appear to have conformed, for some time, and in some important respects, to these usages; — partly from some remains, it would seem, of national feeling, and partly, perhaps principally, from a wish to conciliate *their brethren according to the flesh*. It is true, that even Peter speaks of the ceremonial law as a burden, which neither the men of his time, nor their devout forefathers, *were able to bear*.† We must, in consequence, conclude that the legal services in any way sanctioned by any one of the apostles, were of a very modified and restricted description. Still it is a fact, that, as practised by Jewish converts, many legal customs, and even circumcision itself, were for some time tolerated by the inspired rulers of the church. Paul, speaking generally, was much less a conformist in this respect than his brethren; and appears to have furnished a useful example, not only in the zeal with which

* "As the observance of the old law was sanctioned in "the case of those Christians who (as Jews) had been subject "to it before their conversion; so in the case of the prose- "lytes of the gate, that portion of it which extended to them "received a similar sanction."—Hind's Early Progress of Christianity, I. 270.

† Acts xv. 10.

he resisted all attempts to bring the bondage of the law on the Gentiles, but in the frequency and emphasis with which he declared the utter worthlessness of all such observances even among Jews. When such practices were the effect of a feeling which interfered not with the essential doctrines of Christianity, a humane consideration of the force of prejudice and habit led him to bear with them. But when made at all a ground of confidence before God, they were at once denounced as opposed to every thing which conferred value on the gospel. LECT. IV.

We hesitate to speak of the apostles as consenting to a corruption of the institutions of the New Testament; and we find it still more difficult to suppose that they could become direct parties to such an evil. But a conclusion too much of this character seems to be unavoidable, if we suppose that the dispensation of the gospel was really meant to annul the ritual of the law. That Peter erred thus far, when he withdrew from the Gentiles at Antioch, in deference to the intolerant feeling of his countrymen, is certain, from the uncorrected tone of rebuke in which he was addressed by Paul. His conduct in this instance is described as insincere, unjust, and *not according to the truth of the gospel*;* nor is there any thing in Scripture to allow of our questioning the truth of this representation. We must remember carefully on this subject,

* Epist. Gal.

LECT. IV. that it does not follow because the *written* communications of the apostles were inspired, except when they inform us otherwise, that the whole of their *conduct* was the effect of inspiration. The temporizing of Peter, which we have noticed, was evidently an exception of this kind; and how far the mistaken feeling which led to his delinquency in that instance may have produced similar results in the case of himself, or of his brethren, on other occasions, we are by no means qualified to pronounce.

It must be evident that there would be much in the character and general conduct of the first Christians, to require the forbearance of their instructors. Their creed might embrace the substance of the truth; but it would be, in various respects, both defective and erroneous. Their spirit might exhibit the regenerating power of the gospel; but there would still be much to subdue, and much to acquire. Thus it has ever been. And may we not reasonably ask, is it in modes of worship only, or rather is it the state of mind which has respect to such things, which is to be alone excluded from the pale of charitable endurance? In addition to which, it demands an unusual effort of imagination to place ourselves in the precise circumstances of those Jews who were the first to avow themselves Christians, and to appreciate the whole force of the causes by which they were disposed to attempt a blending of the

ritual to which they had been so long and justly attached with their new religious profession. It must be confessed that we are hardly capable of judging in this matter; and were a strict scrutiny to be prosecuted with regard to ourselves, in order to determine how far we have ourselves been guided by the prejudices of education in our religious preferences, there would, perhaps, be little room left for us to cast a stone against those brethren in the path of imperfection whose conduct is now under consideration.

Difficulty in judging of the conduct of the Apostles in this particular.

That the Levitical ceremonies were parts of the old economy, which had been rendered void by the gospel, and that a retention of them was, in itself, inconsistent with a truly enlightened profession of Christianity, will not, I presume, be disputed. The apostle of the Gentiles, in circumcising Timothy, and in the other parts of his conduct to which he refers, when he states that *with the Jew he became as a Jew*, was far from attaching the slightest value to such instances of conformity, except as conducing to his proposed end, that he might *by all means save some*. The degree in which his practice in this particular was really different from that of Peter at Antioch, and whether at all justifiable or not, are points which, if closely examined, will not be without difficulty. It is true, the only language in the New Testament that would convict him of impropriety in this

LECT. IV. respect is his own; and this we must not consider as justly liable to such a construction. Not only the reproof of Peter, but the circumcision of Timothy, had taken place some years before the Epistle to the Galatians—almost his earliest production—was written; and from the date of that document, its author, we must suppose, would be especially cautious in reference to all matters of compliance with Jewish prejudice. Such compliances could not occur, under any circumstances, without in some measure obscuring the simplicity both of the spirit and ordinances of the gospel; and when submitted to in the spirit of Judaism, they were manifestly subversive of the great object of the Saviour's incarnation and sacrifice. Such is the ultimate view of this controversy presented in the writings of St. Paul; and during many years we find him exposing himself to much artful and malignant opposition, by his efforts to diffuse these enlightened sentiments, not only among the Gentiles, but among the Jews. Hence his great reproach among his countrymen was, that *he taught all men every where against the law.**

* Acts xx. 27, 28. The Epistle to the Galatians would be appealed to as affording abundant proof of this charge; nor would such passages as the following be without their effect:—*The kingdom of God is not meat and drink.* (Rom. xiv. 17.) *I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean in itself.* (Ibid. xiv. 14.) *Whatsoever is sold in the shambles, that eat, asking no questions for conscience sake.* (1 Cor. x. 25.) *Let no man judge you in meat and drink.* (Col. ii. 16.) *Every creature of God is good, and*

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It was not, however, until the second and final overthrow of Jerusalem, by Adrian, about the middle of the second century, that any considerable number of Jewish converts learnt to relinquish their persuasion as to the perpetual obligation of the ceremonial law. Such as still retained this prejudice, then separated from their brethren who were disposed to avail themselves of the liberty possessed in this respect by the Gentiles. But these separatists were soon drawn, as we have seen, into more serious error, and gave rise to the sects on which we have remarked as bearing the name of Ebionites and Nazarenes.

Practical lesson suggested by the preceding facts.

There is enough, I conceive, in this branch of our subject to suggest, that a generous consideration of the infirmities of men, in matters of a religious nature, is always incumbent upon us, subject, of course, to the regulation of broad and acknowledged principle. The errors of men in relation to this duty will usually be the obvious effect of their particular temperament. Narrow and hard minds will err on the side of proscription and severity; those of a more expanding and sympathetic character, in the opposite direction.

Judaism a source of

But we must proceed to observe that the

nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving. (1 Tim. iv. 4.) The anti-Levitical spirit of such texts would occur as a violent shock to Jewish prejudice. On this subject the reader will find some valuable observations in Hind's History of the Early Progress of Christianity, I. 261—281.

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corruption to christian Institutes, chiefly among Gentiles.

injury which has resulted to the christian Institutes from a misapprehension of Judaism on the part of Jews, is trivial compared with what has proceeded from the same cause among Gentiles. The body of Jews professing Christianity subsequent to the apostolic age, was not sufficiently numerous or united to produce any marked impression on its character. But their Gentile successors inherited not a little of their prejudice, and soon became capable of giving a striking prominence to its effects. If we suppose it to have been the will of the Redeemer, that the remnant of Israel to be saved should be brought to substitute the simple ritual of the New Testament in the place of their hereditary usages only by slow degrees, as *they were able to bear it*, (and this, after all, is perhaps the real solution of the difficulty on which we have just been speaking,) the same excuse cannot be urged in behalf of those Gentiles who, at a later period, were wont to make such fond appeals to the pomp and secularity connected with religion under the law, as warranting a similar exhibition of it under the gospel.

The toleration of Jewish customs among converted Jews, was not followed by a similar lenity towards idolatrous customs among converted Gentiles.

It may be presumed that the religious customs of the Gentiles were so far similar to those of the Jews, that if a great forbearance was exercised on such matters in the case of converts from the one class, it could be only reasonable to expect that somewhat of the same course would be found to have been pursued with regard to

those from the other. On this point, however, the Scriptures are most explicit in showing the contrary to have been the fact. The reason is plain. The rites of Judaism, useless as they became after the introduction of the present dispensation, were parts of a system in itself of divine appointment; while those of paganism belonged to a false and impious worship: and on the ground of this important distinction, the tolerance which was for some time shown to the one, was, from the beginning, wholly denied to the other. The tone of injunction addressed to Gentiles on this subject ever was, *touch not, taste not, handle not.*

Even Jewish customs tolerated in Jews only.

In the spirit of this distinction, the apostle who circumcised Timothy, on account of his Jewish extraction, and in the hope thereby of procuring him a hearing with the Jews, not only refused to circumcise Titus, who was a Gentile, but called upon the Gentile converts, without exception, to come out from their idolatrous connexions, and not to *touch the unclean thing.* So strict were the apostolic prohibitions with respect both to Jewish and Pagan customs, when addressing themselves to Gentiles.

Now, whether we contend for the strict equality of the pastors in the primitive church, or concede that some distinction between bishop and presbyter had always been acknowledged, it must still remain obvious, that nearly every thing in the form which ecclesiastical polity in

LECT. IV. the process of time assumed, was not only a marked change from the primitive standard, but a change which it was attempted to justify, in almost every instance, by a reference to the institutions of Judaism. And the same may be said of the many contemporaneous changes in the departments of discipline and worship. It is true, the novelties in these several departments were not in reality derived from Judaism so much as from the state of things which had obtained in connexion with heathenism; but as men became disposed to incorporate them with their profession as Christians, it was deemed prudent to vindicate the introduction of them by a reference to whatever resembled them under the preceding dispensation, rather than to confess their real origin. Had this appeal to the authority of Moses been made ingenuously, the unequivocal protest of St. Paul, especially in his epistle to the Galatians, against all such admixtures, must have remained to brand them as anti-christian. But at the commencement of the fourth century, the fondness for a paganized Christianity had become so general and dominant, as to bear every thing before it; and much before that time, converts from Judaism were so few, or so soon lost in the mass of Gentile believers, that they had ceased to be of any importance in ecclesiastical history.*

* Mr. Hind notices the practice "of assigning a heathen "origin to several of the corruptions of the christian church,

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Extent of the corruptions there introduced.

From this period, the writings of the Fathers abound with comparisons between the polity and worship of the two dispensations. Every central or larger church is described as a temple, and set forth, in its vast and various compartments, as the resemblance of its great prototype at Jerusalem. The prince under whose auspices it may have risen, is lauded as the Solomon of his age; and the person filling its episcopal throne, if much concerned in the erection or improvement, was hailed as another Zerubbabel. The ministers of the edifices so described, were very naturally called priests, and distinguished by gradations of office, descending from the high-priest himself, down to the *hewers of wood and drawers of water*. All, moreover, were to be known from each other by their respective costume, as well

" which, although manifestly resembling heathen ceremonies, were immediately derived from the Jews," and complains of it as an error.—(Hist. of the Early Progress of Christianity, I. 263.) The fact is, however, as I have stated it; and were it otherwise, the Judaizing of Gentiles, while professing themselves Christians, is as little susceptible of vindication as their symbolizing with heathenism. Mr. Hind is an author of deserved reputation. It is, however, almost amusing to find him describing Mosheim as " well read in *secondary* sources of information," but as negligent and unskilful in the use of " original materials!" This deficiency is said to be especially observable " in his account of the con- " stitution of the primitive and apostolic church, especially of " the episcopacy, and of the authority of church assemblies." (Pref. xiv.) For the Doctor's errors on these points it is natural that a cause should be discovered, or at least imagined, by *one* class of his readers.

LECT. IV. as by the place or office assigned them in every public assembly. In their functions, the same parallel between the past and the present was preserved. Each rank had its special duties allotted to it; and as the Lord's table had become an altar, and his ministers priests, there was, as a matter of course, some sacrifice to offer, the eucharist being the service especially so regarded. In addition to which, all the religious sanctions employed to secure the emolument awarded to the Jewish priesthood, were soon resorted to in aid of their successors in name and pretension. Hence, not only the private estates of the church, but the fixed and general endowment of tithes.* The mediatorial character sustained by the descendants of Aaron was eagerly seized by the shrewd ambition of a prosperous clergy; and that they might vend those spiritual commodities, which they assumed the sole right of dispensing, with the greatest advantage, the body of worshippers was formed into ascending classes, from the novice, within the outer wall, to the more advanced catechumen, and to the participant in the most sacred mysteries. All this, and more, was the condition which things assumed in the church immediately on her obtaining the patronage of the Emperor Constantine: and the easy vindication of the wondrous change was in the precedent of

* The Greeks adopted the Oriental custom of offering a *tenth* to the gods. Potter, Lib. II. c. 4.

Hebrew sovereigns and of the Hebrew nation.* This was a plea level to every capacity,—a weapon which every hand could use. Had such practices been strictly peculiar to heathenism, we may conclude that the outrage of introducing them into the christian church would have been too great to have been endured or attempted; but as copied from Judaism, the innovation was less marked, and less liable to detection, at least with the unreflecting multitude to whom such an order of things has ever been agreeable. Thus the distinct character of the two economies, and their true relation to each other, was artfully concealed, in order that the divine authority might be urged in favour of those maxims and manners under the gospel, which it had emphatically restricted to the ministration of the law; bringing down the ministration of the Spirit to the level of those "beggarly elements" which had characterised the dispensation designed to be nothing more than its harbinger and servant. The Judaizing of Hebrew converts in the primitive church, compared with this conduct, was almost excusable.

These corruptions still existing.

And need I remark, that what established Christianity became under Constantine, that it has continued to be in the greater part of Christendom to this day. In every opulent national church, whether Catholic or Protestant, the same

* See Eusebius's account of the consecration of the church at Tyre, Eccles. Hist. Lib. X. c. iv.

LECT. IV. manner of proceeding in this respect is observable. Were this matter left to be a question of mere taste or expediency, some difficulty might occur in coming to a decision upon it. An understanding properly cultivated must hold all secular pomp and circumstance connected with religion as adapted rather to conceal than to exhibit its excellencies. But as the mind of the great majority is far from being the seat of refined perceptions and sympathies, the propriety of such religious forms, in relation to the greater portion of our race, has often been strenuously advocated even by intelligent men. We shall have occasion to return to this subject before the conclusion of these Lectures; but must here distinctly observe, that the question is not left to be decided at the tribunal of human judgment. It is matter of positive scriptural enactment that the ceremonial law is legally extinct: and it is abundantly plain that any continuance of its forms, however modified, in the Gentile church, is precisely that usage which the apostles barely tolerated in the Jew, and sternly prohibited to the Gentile. That these practices, while borrowed mainly from heathenism, and with a view solely to heathen prejudices, were set forth as sanctioned by the customs of the Judaic church, is a circumstance which only tends to add the guilt of hypocrisy to the original offence.

LECTURE V.

ON THE CORRUPTION OF CHRISTIANITY FROM THE INFLUENCE OF GENTILE PHILOSOPHY.

LECTURE V.

COLOSSIANS II. 8.

Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.

Comprehensive nature of the ancient philosophy.

Philosophy, according to the larger meaning of that term, embraces whatever may conduce to the well-being of humanity. Considered with respect to the physical sciences, it includes all the means by which the properties of the material universe are examined and rendered obedient to our wishes;—so as to become a kind of reflection of human intelligence. Viewed in relation to society, it comprehends the whole of that jurisprudence by which the distinctions of right and wrong are recognized, and the whole of those artificial arrangements by which such distinctions are enforced. But it is not enough that the heavens and the earth are made tributary, on a larger scale, to the wants of man; or that the institutions belonging to his social state should be so constructed as to respect the interests

LECT. V. of all, while imparting an efficient stimulus to each. From what is adapted to the necessities of social life, men will advance to the things which embellish it, and hence the further developments of science, of the arts, and of literature.

Nor is this all. There are still sympathies in man which require their appropriate objects. It is not the earth, when rendered most obedient; it is not society, when its nice framework has been most wisely balanced; it is not art, when its most successful results are set forth in lavish abundance, that will lead man to say—it is enough. All these belong to the visible; and it is not the disposition of human nature to suppose that the only things to be realized are the things which are seen. The spiritual, in some of its innumerable forms, must be added to the sensual, and the future to the present;—and as having to do with these sympathies, in common with whatever pertains to human nature, philosophy has been made to embrace religion itself. Under this term, as used by the ancients, all the branches of knowledge we have named were certainly included. In the language of its votaries, it was the science of reasoning and reflection; which, while in itself nothing, embraced every thing, and methodized and sublimated every thing. That it contributed much to elevate and adorn the present will be conceded; and if less successful when attempting

to realize the invisible and the future, it was in a great degree because the objects with which it affected to be conversant were beyond the range of its perceptions.

The history of philosophy, therefore, may be described as the natural history of man. It is the record of his intelligence and inclinations; of his natural and moral capabilities. It necessarily presents a varied picture, resulting from the widely different circumstances in which the several portions of the human family have been placed; and from the different degrees and modifications of attainment to which these circumstances have been favourable or otherwise. But its history is still the history of humanity, though the false may be too often more conspicuous than the true, and the evil greatly exceed the good. The philosophy of a people, if adequately treated, must present the most complete view of their character. It must exhibit the influence of their reason, and their natural tendencies, not in regard to one thing, but to all things, determining both the complexion and extent of their general culture.

Connexion between the state of Gentile philosophy and the early history of Christianity.

It follows, then, that, to be acquainted with the state of philosophy at the time of the advent, is to be acquainted, not only with the general nature, but with the particular combination, or the mixed quality of the material on which Christianity had to operate;—and to observe the fluctuations of the different philosophical

LECT. V. systems in subsequent ages, is to be aware of the precise character of the difficulties, or the encouragements, which have been attendant on the history, as well as the promulgation, of our holy religion.

Division of ancient philosophy.

I. The systems of philosophy which prevailed in the apostolic age may be all included under the designation of the Oriental, the Grecian, or the Roman. The Oriental had long pervaded the nations of the east. The Grecian was the offspring, in a great degree, of the Oriental; and, before the commencement of the christian era, had been subject to new modifications from the same source. The Roman, toward the same period, was chiefly remarkable as embracing the most opposite selections, borrowed from the different state of things, which had existence among the various communities then subject to the authority of the Cæsars. The character of each of these great results of human wisdom is intimately connected with the design of these Lectures.

The Oriental.

1. The Oriental Philosophy, after having long ministered to the pride and power of the Babylonian empire, was moulded into the form in which it is best known to us by the genius of the great Persian reformer, Zoroaster. It taught, as a leading doctrine, that the present world had derived its existence from two causes or principles, the one good and the other evil. The former was described as the parent of light, and of our spiritual and rational nature; the latter

as the parent of darkness, and of the form under which the gross substance now appears constituting the material system. These rival powers were viewed as being, in a sense, not only the creators, but the governors of our mixed order of affairs. Hence the perpetual conflict between good and evil in the natural and moral world. But above Oromasdes, the immediate source of all terrestrial good, and Aromanius, the generator of all its evil, was Mithra—the supreme deity, whose appropriate emblem was the sun, or, in its absence, the sacred fire, which was never allowed to be extinguished. It was also the doctrine of Zoroaster, that, beside Oromasdes and Aromanius, there were various spiritual natures, which had emanated from the Supreme Existence, and which had their respective places assigned them in the vast space between the immediate presence of deity, and the distant gradation allotted to man. These were said to partake of intelligence and happiness, in proportion to their nearness to the fountain of light and felicity; while matter became dark, inert, and liable to evil, as we now find it, purely as the consequence of the distance at which it is placed from the illuminating and spiritualizing influence of the centre of all being. Even matter, however, it was sometimes said, should, in its turn, be refined,—being attracted into the nearer presence of the Great One:—thus prepared for its sublime elevation, it was

LECT. V. to be restored, together with the spirits of men, to the source from which it had proceeded. By others, the consummation of all things was regarded as consisting in the removal of matter to its original state of distance and separation from the spiritual universe.

It will be seen from these statements, that Oromasdes was regarded as the *former*, rather than the *creator*, of the present world;—matter, in the system of Zoroaster, being necessarily eternal. Nor is it difficult to account for the leading peculiarities of this system, fraught, as it may seem, on a slight view of it, with absurdity. It was assumed as a maxim by most of the ancients, that, "from nothing, nothing can proceed;" and the immediate consequence of this assumption, as then understood, was the eternity of matter. The same conclusion followed, moreover, from the doctrine which described matter as the necessary and inherent dwelling-place of evil; for, as such, it was not to be viewed as the production of a nature perfect in intelligence and rectitude. Hence it may be affirmed, speaking strictly, that the philosophers of antiquity had no knowledge of a Creator. Their history of all material existences, whether considered on a larger or smaller scale, was a history of successive transformations, and no more. In the judgment of this class of persons, in every region, the whole universe was but "the varied God:" a development of the Infinite Existence,

all its parts being disclosures of himself, and all its changes being included in his one act of emission or absorption. But in the doctrine of the two principles, we see the effort of the human mind to explain the contradictory facts in the present condition of the species; or, in other words, to account for the origin of evil without imputing it to the Supreme Being. With respect to the scheme of emanations, it resulted almost as a matter of course from an attempt to fill up the unnatural void which is conceived by the imagination as intervening between the insignificance of man and the greatness of the Infinite. It will appear, in its proper place, that the most marked corruptions of Christianity, in its early history, resulted from the influence of this system on the imaginative and mystical sympathies prevalent among the great communities of Egypt and Asia.

Its theocratic tendency.

There is also another feature distinguishing the Oriental Philosophy, which should not be overlooked, as we find it making its appearance in a subsequent age in connexion with Christianity:—we advert to the spirit of *theocracy* by which it was pervaded. The nations of the east have had their diversities with respect to religion in common with the people of other regions, but they have always been agreed in regarding theology as their parent science. Not only their jurisprudence, but even their most abstract departments of knowledge, have been

LECT. V. taught either as parts of their religion, or as matters which must be retained in invariable subjection to it. According to the philosophy which has most widely obtained among them, there is an Eternal Principle, which is every thing, and man is nothing. It is from their conceptions of this principle that all their knowledge has its complexion, and its appropriation—exhibiting the experience and actions of men, and even man himself, as no more than parts of one varied mode of subsistence which we call *nature*, and which is in fact the ever-changing manifestation of an ever-moving energy, assigning existence or decay, without cessation, and with equal indifference, to the inert and the animate, insects and men. It is true, the spirit of theocracy, which disclosed itself by slow degrees in ecclesiastical history, was not founded on a theology, in all respects, of this mysterious and terrible description; but the degree in which this tendency of orientalism affected a large mass of persons, and many great names, among the Christians of the first four centuries, did much to prepare the way for that reign of the *priest-caste* by which Christendom was so long enslaved. Every one must perceive that the tendency of the Oriental Philosophy, whether viewed in its earlier stages, or in its later forms of Gnosticism and Manicheism, was to induce a disposition to luxuriate rather than to act; to endure rather than to dare. Submission was its

great law. Hence its invariable alliance with civil despotism; and to the same cause we must, in a great degree, ascribe the marvellous fixedness of its character. Its principles and its effects in the age of Alexander were precisely those which distinguish it through the eastern world at this day.

Its moral influence.

Of its moral influence it is not easy to speak with accuracy. By teaching men to regard their souls only as the offspring of the good principle, and their bodies, as the production of the evil one, it ministered to practical conclusions of the most opposite description. On the ground of this doctrine, the ascetic professed to place the perfection of religion in the severest subjection of the appetites, and the most complete separation from sensible objects. By the voluptuary, on the contrary, it was argued, that the indulgence of the animal passions could hardly partake of criminality, otherwise religion must be, in some sense, an attribute of matter as well as of mind, — a conclusion which contravened the leading dogma of orientalism. It is not necessary to dwell, in this place, on the visionary and often painful excesses to which the former of these opinions naturally led; nor on the sophistry which must have been employed to render the latter at all plausible.*

* Brucker's Hist. Crit. Philos. I. 102—228. II. 639—652. Mosheim, De Rebus ante Constant. Introd. Beausobre, Histoire de Manichée, I. 241—335. Matter. Hist. du Gnostisme, I. 1—236, *et alibi*.

LECT. V.
The Grecian philosophy.

2. Leaving Egypt, southern and eastern Asia, and passing along the plains of Asia-Minor, we reach the seat of Troy, and the eye rests on that flow of waters which breaks on the islands and shores of Greece in its passage toward the Mediterranean sea—*the great sea* of the ancient world. It was among the people of this more favoured region that philosophy began to assume an independent character. Here it ceased to be a mere appendage to the priest's office; and was cultivated, in not a few of its departments, with an energy and success which later generations have rarely equalled, never exceeded. It is important, however, to remember, that the elements of the early Greek character, whether good or evil, were all of oriental origin. The branch also shared, for a time, in certain feeble properties observable in the parent stem, but lived to inhale a vigour peculiar to itself. From the east, where the truths of revelation were first promulgated, but where they were so soon forgotten or corrupted, the fathers of the Grecian states derived their language, their alphabet, their institutions, and their doctrines in relation to the origin and government of the universe. But these doctrines, though long retained, more or less, by speculative and learned men, soon ceased to perplex the popular apprehension. The polytheism which commended itself so strongly to the more inventive and practical genius of the Greeks, taught them to worship

the attributes of humanity in preference to abstractions; — a change, which, though it may seem a descent, was, with all its faults, no small improvement.

But, unhappily, it is not in regard to questions of religion, or of duty, the points with which we now have chiefly to do, that the Greeks were so much in advance of other nations. A mere glance at the leading tenets of the more popular sects among them will be sufficient to show that with respect to the most important matters in the circle of human knowledge, *professing themselves to be wise they became foolish.*

The doctrines maintained by the most celebrated sects in Greece at the commencement of the christian era with regard to the powers above humanity, were such, in fact, as served to preclude every thing deserving the name of religion. Nor was it much otherwise with the science of morals, as exhibited in the most prevalent systems relating to it.

The Epicureans. The Epicureans, who were a sort of pagan Sadducees, admitted the existence of some divine power, but denied its interference or oversight with regard to human affairs. The world they described as the result of a fortuitous concourse of atoms; and its continued changes as equally the effect of chance. The soul they believed to be generated with the body, and to perish with it; placing their chief good in the pleasures of present life, and the highest wisdom in such a

LECT. V. degree of self-government as should be conducive to the largest amount of luxurious gratification. All excess was proscribed,—not as partaking of vice, but as partaking of imprudence; moderation being indispensable, if the circle of pleasurable indulgence is to be extended much beyond the ordinary limit. St. Paul adverts to the many who had adopted this mixture of atheism and sensuality, as wont to say, *Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.* Its schools were every where crowded with the prosperous and the wealthy; and with not a few, who, hoping to obtain a place with that class, were not unwilling to learn the arts of voluptuousness before-hand. Epicurus himself is said to have been a man of pure manners, and his lessons on self-discipline have been described as the lessons of virtue; but in the practice of his followers they became the seed of a degeneracy contemptible beyond example.*

The Academics.

The scepticism of the Epicureans, which released them from all kind of restraint, except what the law of selfishness imposed, was embraced, with some restriction, by the Academics. The chief difference between these rival sects appears to have been, that the latter, denouncing the almost unlimited scepticism of the former, professed to regard *probable* evidence as a sufficient guide in pursuit of truth. But as the

* Brucker, Hist. Crit. Philos. Pars II. Lib. II. c. xii. xiii. Mosheim, De Rebus ante Constant. Introd. Sect. I. c. xxv.

evidence to be adduced with respect to the existence and nature of supernatural powers, the immortality of the soul, and the preferableness, in many cases, of virtue to vice, was not deemed, even by the Academics, as placing these points beyond suspicion, the probable evidence of the one school became almost as tolerant of doubt and depravity, as the more avowed scepticism of the other. It may be added, that the doctrine of the Academic sect had almost ceased to exist, when Cicero made himself known as its patron and reformer.*

The Peripatetics.

The Peripatetics followed the doctrines of Aristotle, in whose system the character of the Deity was little more elevated than as described by Epicurus; while the government of the world, after the manner of that philosopher, was abandoned to occult causes; and the immortality of the soul was at best a matter of doubtful speculation.

The Stoics.

By the Stoics, who openly rejected the notion of a future state, the occurrences of life were attributed to the decrees of fate, the Deity himself being subject, in common with all his works, to a law of necessity.†

General character of these systems.

It must be evident, on the slightest review of these systems, that they are less remarkable on

* Cicero, Tusculan. Disput. Lib. I. c. ix. De Natura Deor. Lib. I. c. iii. Brucker, Hist. Crit. Philos. Pars II. Lib. II. c. vi. Mosheim, De Rebus ante Constant. Introd. Sect. I. c. xxvi.

† Brucker, Hist. Crit. Philos. Pars II. Lib. II. c. vii. c. ix. Tom. II. Pars I. c. ii. Sect. v. vii.

LECT. V. account of any traces of truth they may contain, than on account of their imperfections and their errors. The Stoic and Peripatetic schemes are frequently noticed as much less liable to objection than those of the Epicureans and Academics. But in the passive deity of the one, there was little to be either feared or loved; and still less in the purely mechanical, mysterious principle acknowledged by the other. We have to remember, therefore, on this subject, that beside the confused and necessarily barren conception of the Deity common to all these sects, there was the fact, that the doctrine of a future state was always either denied or suspected by them; and that the influence of the Divinity over the affairs of men was invariably excluded, either by a supposed law of necessity, or by the assumption of his voluntary abstraction from our low concerns. When these points are considered, we can scarcely forbear to ask, where, in these boasted results of human sagacity, are the motives that could have led to any semblance of true religion, or even of sound morality? At the same time, no man can be acquainted with the life of Cicero, the Academic, or with that of Cato Utica, the Stoic, without perceiving that, however faulty the substratum may have been, the superstructure connected with systems of this nature might sometimes be found to present much deserving of praise. While such men, however, were better than their creed, it is

manifest that the majority availed themselves of its vicious license, and to the full.*

The Platonists.

Plato was, in nearly all respects, the most successful of philosophers. In his speculations, the Parent of the universe is regarded as its governor, and as being separate in his nature from all material things. From his purely spiritual existence proceed the souls of men, which, on account of the spirituality of their being, are, like himself, immortal. With the immortality of the soul this philosopher connected the doctrine of future rewards and punishments; and by means of these sanctions, together with his better code of morals, and his more rational views of the divine perfections, he conferred much permanent benefit on mankind. But it will not be supposed that the visions of Plato are always trustworthy, nor that the truth announced by him is without its mixture of error. "Not to mention," says Mosheim, "his frequent

* Lactantius was aware both of the excellencies and defects of this class of instructors. "Plato et Aristoteles, "honesta quidem, voluntate justitiam defendere cupierunt; "effecissentque aliquid, si conatus eorum bonos, si eloquen- "tiam, si virtutem ingenii, divinarum quoque rerum doctrina "juvisset. Itaque opus illorum inane atque inutile jacuit; "nec cuiquam hominum persuadere potuerunt, ut eorum "prescripto viveret, quia fundamentum a cœlo disciplina illa "non habuit. Nostrum opus certuis sit necesse est, quos "Deus docuit."—Lactant. Div. Institut. Lib. V. c. xvii. See also Dr. Clarke's Discourse concerning the obligations of Natural Religion, p. 327—370. Mosheim, De Rebus ante Constant. Introd. c. i. sect. xx. xxi.

LECT. V. "assumption of things without proof, he often "expresses himself in an enigmatical form; "ascribing to the power which he praises as the "architect of the world, and its former from "an eternal substance, neither infinitude, im- "mensity, omnipresence, nor omniscience, but "supposing him to be confined within certain "limits, and to have committed the government "of the world to a number of ministers called "*demons*. What he teaches concerning these "demons, and concerning the origin and con- "dition of the human soul, tends very strongly "to produce superstition, and to confirm men "in the worship of subordinate divinities. The "mind, while connected with the body, he "viewed as in a prison, and inculcated, that its "escape from this thraldom, and its restoration "to its proper state of alliance with the divine "nature, could only be accomplished by means "of contemplation. The effect of this doctrine "on the mind of the weak and the speculative "was to produce a neglect of the body, and of "the ordinary concerns of life, and a disposition "to abandon themselves to the dreams of the "imagination."*

It will be seen from this extract, that the Oriental philosophy, in its less extravagant form, contributed largely to the system of Plato. We learn also, from his biographers, that Plato visited Egypt, not only for the purpose of being

* De Rebus ante Constant. Introd. c. i. sect. xxix.

instructed in astronomy, but "that he might become acquainted with the doctrine of its prophets;" and the same writers inform us, that if this "divine" teacher failed to extend his travel to the immediate country of the Magi, and even to India, for the same purpose, it was not from the want of a sufficiently favourable estimate of oriental wisdom.* LECT. V.

The Eclecties

But while these systems were seen to be in so little agreement with each other, it did not require much shrewdness to suspect, that such of their number as embraced the largest measure of truth were by no means free from error, and that even those which, as a whole, were most erroneous, were not without their useful lessons. It was from a conviction of this kind, and from a wish to select the excellencies of all systems, without exclusively adopting any, that the Eclectic sect derived both its origin and its name. It made its appearance in Alexandria not long before the publication of Christianity; and in that great city, where the human mind was exposed to the full influence of nearly every thing that had ever been taught on the subject of philosophy, the new sect soon became popular. With the Eclectics, the leading doctrines of Plato formed the *nucleus* to which their selections from other sources were attached. It must

* Apuleius, De Philos. Platon. Brucker, Hist. Crit. Philos. Pars II. Lib. II. c. vi. Tom. II. Pars I. c. II. sect. iii.

LECT. V. not be supposed, however, that the principle of Eclecticism was a novelty peculiar to Alexandria, or to the period immediately preceding the advent: this had always been more or less acted upon, but it was in Alexandria, and at the time we have mentioned, that it so far prevailed as to become the rallying point of a powerful sect.*

State of philosophy among the Romans.

Indeed, the practice which this term was used to designate always obtained among the Romans. It was not until much within a century of the christian era that the authorities among that extraordinary people can be said to have granted even toleration to the study of philosophy, considered as a science. That proud hardihood, and that preference of the barely useful, which is so long observable in the character and manners of the ancient Romans, taught them to suspect such studies of a tendency rather to effeminate and demoralize, than to impart firmness and dignity to the inner man. The degeneracy which had come upon Greece did much to produce and perpetuate this prejudice; nor was it ever so far subdued as to admit the formation of schools of philosophy, or the existence of a class of men separated to teach it, as among the Greeks. There were a few who became distinguished as philosophers in the

* Brucker, Hist. Crit. Philos. Tom. II. Pars I. cap. ii. sect. iv. Matter, Essai Historique sur l'Ecole d'Alexandrie, II. 130—137, 236, 252.

Greek sense; but even Seneca, and Pliny the naturalist, were as much statesmen as philosophers. In Rome, the investigations and discussions of philosophy were the employment of leisure hours only; those who were most distinguished by their attention to it being generally much better known from their success as public functionaries, or as men versed in practical affairs.* Examples of this kind are seen in Scipio Africanus, in Marcus Brutus, and in Cato Utica. Cicero, as is well known, distinguished himself in the separate pursuits of Demosthenes and Plato. It was this view of philosophy, as being rather speculative, or ornamental, than of any immediate practical worth, that led the most sagacious and powerful people known in history to content themselves with adopting the theories of their polished neighbours, instead of attempting to break up new ground for themselves. LECT. V.

Hence the history of philosophy among the conquerors of Greece is little more than a description of the changes to which the Grecian and Oriental systems were subject during the convulsions which destroyed the republic, and through that long course of degrading events which continued to waste the strength of the

* "At populo Romano nunquam ea copia fuit: quia prudentissimus quisque negotiosus maxume erat: ingenium nemo sine corpore exercebat: optimus quisque facere, quam dicere: sua ab aliis bene facta laudari, quam ipse aliorum narrare, malebat."—Sallust, Bellum Catalinarium.

LECT. V. empire. In all this interval there was much modification, but no invention; and the true or the false, by which the received systems had long been characterised, became the matter of fashionable profession, as the taste of the court, or the slightly varying tone of public feeling, happened to dictate.

Inferences from this review.

Such, then, was the general state of opinion with regard to truth, in its more important departments, at the time of the Saviour's appearance. And if there be any inference that may be deduced with certainty from this brief retrospect, that inference must assuredly be our need of some better guidance than unaided reason on matters of religion and moral obligation,—in a word, the necessity of a divine revelation.

Necessity of a Divine Revelation.

Looking to the future, it was not to be supposed that it would supply minds superior to those of the past in natural endowment, in the labours of self-culture, or in genuine solicitude to distinguish between truth and error. The folly of any such expectation appears to have been generally felt. We see the prevalence of this feeling in the spread of Eclecticism, which was the substituting of selection in the place of research; and in the course pursued by the Romans as the mere imitators of their Grecian tributaries. The age of sublime invention, of proud anticipation, had passed; and as though but too conscious of this humiliating fact, the noblest minds aspire to nothing beyond a

remodelling of previous wisdom, or an endless commentating upon it. They might illustrate, or shape anew; but that they were capable of making any real addition to the lessons of their great masters, was a presumption to which their temerity rarely extended. It seemed to be tacitly agreed, that human sagacity had done its work; that the great experiment, as to how far the human mind may proceed in the path of discovery, had been fully tried; and that, unless some new source of illumination should be opened to the world, man must continue his conflict with inexplicable contradictions, shut up to the alternative of believing scarcely any thing, or very commonly believing a lie.

It is confessed that instances were not wanting of individuals distinguished by purity of manners, and by much self-denial in the cause of what they esteemed virtue. But every informed and unprejudiced mind must be aware, that the causes producing these rare exceptions consisted in mere circumstances,—in matters having nothing of the clearness or the force of law in them; and which could not, on that account, possess any general efficacy as applied even to the educated, and must have been wholly unsuited to operate on the mass of mankind. It was the admission of Socrates, that the labours of moralists must continue to be generally inefficient until the wisdom of their science should be expounded and enforced by some messenger

LECT. V. divinely qualified for his vocation. It was to this desponding sage that Aristodemus observed, he should become a worshipper of the gods, whenever their ambassador should appear, to settle the questions of human duty; and even Cicero speaks of wanting some further evidence as to the sufficiency of virtue for happiness. In short, all the uncertainty and error which had characterised the speculations of the ancients on the divine nature, and the government of the world, were necessarily interwoven, in their various consequences, with all the ancient systems of morals. The need was of an instructor, who should reveal "the unknown God," and who, by the light of that manifestation, should exhibit at once the true obligation and the true condition of our fallen nature.

Strong disposition in men to make opinions conformable to their particular tastes and temperaments.

Another observation urged upon us by this review of the ancient systems of philosophy, and one intimately connected with our immediate object, is the proof which it affords of the determination of mankind to render all systems of opinion subservient to what may happen to be their own particular and favourite tendencies.

What do we see in all these systems but a kind of reflection, or portraiture, of the very humanity with which we still have to do? We see schools and instructors make their appearance, of a character in the strictest agreement with the different circumstances, and the differences in temperament, which have never failed

to separate the human family into classes. We see the doctrine of Pythagoras, whether published in Athens or Rome, producing its effect on the ascetic; while the contemplative are no less attracted by that of Plato. Men of severe habits, but withal of active dispositions, choose the school of Zeno as their favourite resort; while such as are inclined to a life of ease and indulgence, bestow their preference on the gardens of Epicurus. And if even Plato should not be visionary enough to meet the demands of an Asiatic imagination, there were the flights of the Oriental philosophy, presenting an almost boundless space for the excursions of that treacherous faculty. In all these systems—equally the work of man—the impress is from man himself. They are at once the demand and supply of his own nature. He would have them exist, and he gives them existence. It is his pleasure to be what he is; and it is his pleasure that the acknowledged principles of duty and religion should approve of his being such; and these principles, that they may be thus conformed to the varying inclinations of men, have been made subject to changes, modifications, and admixtures, which must elude all attempt at description. LECT. V.

General source of error among men.

It must appear, then, that, to ascertain the sources of opinion or usage, in ancient as in modern times, it will not be well that we ascend to the regions of abstraction, or that we give

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our main attention to paths of abstruse reasoning. It will be much wiser to acquaint ourselves with those peculiarities in mental character, in physical condition, and general circumstances, by which mankind have always been influenced so as to present at once the variety and the sameness by which human nature has ever been distinguished. The degrees of capability which attach to human reason, separately considered afford no adequate explanation of the diversities observable in human opinion. This chaos of results must be traced to those endless combinations in the natural and social state of mankind, which contribute so mightily to the work of education, in the most extended view of it; and to the reaction of education, thus viewed, on what may have been the native tendencies of the mind or of the animal passions. When judging of the notions avowed by any portion of a community, whether in the present or the past, this course of proceeding, so little flattering to our presumed independence and ingenuousness, is the only one that can lead to just conclusions. Men, unhappily, are not governed by evidence;—a more powerful arbiter is found in personal inclination, or general usage.

The search of the ancients for truth not only a failure, but an occasion of injurious prejudice.

It is not, then, too much to affirm, that after every thing which philosophy could do, human nature was found to be, in reality, what it had always been. The civilization of the Grecian states may have been an improvement on that of

the eastern nations; and there was much in the character of the Roman power that stood in a yet nearer relation to the reasonable and the useful. But along with the advantages to be derived from any measure of truth which mankind may thus seem to have obtained, was the fatal disadvantage of a more proud and inveterate prejudice on the side of the many errors which every where remained in admixture with that truth. The substance of our primitive ignorance and misconception was retained; and only seemed more likely than ever to continue, being protected by that conceit of superior wisdom which the efforts made in the prosecution of discovery, and their supposed degree of success, had served to produce. Not a point of religious belief had been really settled; scarcely a question of duty determined; but the regions of thought, crowded as they were with their old uncertainties, had been rendered fascinating by the genius which had been employed in giving to its shadows something of the vividness and beauty of the real and the true. Thus error not only remained, but remained as having received the homage of the truth, even from men who were revered as the wisest of their species;—its demolition, accordingly, was never more difficult. LECT. V.

Such being the state of the human mind when the gospel was about to be published to all nations, it is important, in connexion with the

LECT. V. object of these Lectures, that we endeavour to realize the kind of reception which *such* a world would most probably give to *such* a communication.

Query—what was likely to be the effect of the Gentile philosophy on Christianity?

The sincere believer is disposed to judge of the feeling that would be evinced with regard to Christianity from his own grateful estimate of its value, more than from an adequate attention to the hostility in reference to it which is inherent in the present condition of human nature. Placing ourselves at Jerusalem, and looking abroad on the intellectual and moral state of the kingdoms of the world, could we anticipate that the message of salvation, however well attested, would be generally embraced? Or, that if embraced, it would be preserved from the corruption with which it would be every where threatened on the part of the wisdom of this world? Could we expect that the Stoic would at once receive its precepts of humility and kindliness? or that the Epicurean would at once approve its law of self-denial, and its ardour of devotion? Could we persuade ourselves that the Oriental visionary would readily bring his vain imagination to the obedience of a sober faith? or that the admirers of the celestial Plato would soon learn to credit the existence of a greater Master? The conclusion to which calm reflection would conduct us, while looking over such a scene, would rather be, that unless a power should accompany the gospel, greatly

exceeding what had hitherto been connected, even with revealed truth, or than would seem to comport with the character of the divine government in its relation to our world, the result would be much of the kind which history has recorded. LECT. V.

The humble Christian will only need call to mind a few of the facts which occur in the lives of the prophets, and in the narratives of the evangelists, to be convinced that it is not the momentous import of a message, nor the enlightened sanctity of the messenger, nor the evidence of miracles, nor even the ordinary spiritual influences from on high, that will prove successful in removing the obdurate blindness to which the majority of mankind have ever shown themselves disposed. And with regard to those who place no faith in the gospel, and who make its partial success an objection to its claims, it should be enough to repeat, that the Being who suffered the light of nature to be abused as we have seen it was in the ancient world, may have equally wise ends to accomplish by permitting the rejection or perversion of the truths of revelation in these later times. The more we examine the history of the nations of antiquity, the more lucid must be the proof that there is not an argument to be adduced against Christianity on the ground of its corruptions, that may not be urged with much greater propriety against what is called the religion of nature. The scrip-

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tural doctrine of human depravity accounts for the result in the one case; the deistical theory, which fails to recognize our lapsed state, adds to the difficulty a hundredfold in the other.

The promulgation of the gospel by Jews, a further occasion of prejudice.

It should be observed also, with respect to the *probable* influence of the ancient philosophy on revelation, that there was much in the channel through which Christianity was made known to the world, that would occasion offence, and that would sometimes lead to an injurious treatment of it, even on the part of those professing to admit its general claims. In the conceptions which prevailed with regard to the character of the Jewish people, there was little to induce the slightest prejudice in favour of such a communication as proceeding from such a source, and much that could not fail to produce a bias on the opposite side. The severity with which that people had maintained their separation from other nations, and the peculiarity of their religious pretensions in general, had not tended, at any time, to conciliate their neighbours. Nor had their science, or their literature, been such as to inspire homage or confidence among the surrounding nations. It is, nevertheless, from the midst of this people that the light of revealed truth is said to break forth, and it is by some of the humblest persons from among this obnoxious and comparatively unimportant community that men are to learn in what this truth consists. If we bear in mind the offence which

these circumstances have given to modern sceptics, we may judge of the force with which they would operate in the early ages of the gospel. To admit the necessity of a revelation at all was conceived to be humiliating, but to receive it from the hand of a Jew was to descend much lower. Now it is to be observed as a general principle, that the causes which produce a total disregard of Christianity in the case of some men, are precisely those which will lead to a taking of injurious liberties with it, that is, to a corruption of it, in the case of others. The facts now adverted to, while seized by one man as a species of argument showing the gospel to be a cunningly devised fable, are just those which would occur to another as affording a kind of sanction to that unhallowed freedom with which he is disposed to treat it while calling himself a Christian. In this manner Christianity would become liable to its share of injury from that Eclectic spirit which had taught men to question the infallibility of the greatest names, and to mutilate the most applauded systems; so much being taken as might be deemed admissible, and what remained, either explained away, or at once and altogether rejected.

Peculiar criminality of philosophical prejudice.

From the character of the agency which it pleased the Almighty to employ in making known his will to mankind, it seems no more than reasonable to conclude, that while every class of men have their prejudices, those of the

LECT. V. philosophical and the learned are of a nature to deserve, in the view of the supreme Ruler, the smallest degree of consideration. Such men should ever be more free from prejudice than the unreflecting and uninstructed; and if still enslaved by it, they may be left the more justly to the consequences of such thraldom. Hence *not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty are called.*

From the series of observations now made, it follows, that in order to our judging correctly with regard to the causes of the corruption of Christianity, it is strictly necessary that a studious attention should be given to the general character of the ancient systems of philosophy, and to the particular state of those systems at the period of the Incarnation. It must be perceived also, for the same reasons, that it will be necessary a similar course should be pursued with regard to the state of pagan wisdom in the ages which followed, when we find it in actual conflict with the religion of the cross. But on this second division of our present topic, a more rapid sketch must suffice.

State of philosophy under the Roman Emperors.

II. The extinction of the republic, which proved the grave of Roman liberty, was nearly coeval with the birth of Christianity. The despotism of the empire followed in the train of that general corruption of manners which had been some time in progress; and with this corruption, increasing as it did through many centuries,

Christianity had every where to contend. The causes of the decline and fall of the empire were the same which gave it existence. They began with itself, and never ceased to be part of itself. It was itself the offspring of degeneracy, and by the hand that formed it was it wasted and destroyed. The principal effect of the religion of Holy Writ was to check the violence of this antecedent deterioration, and thus to break the force of a fall which it could not prevent. It then devolved on Christianity, enfeebled by its various and protracted contest, to construct the social edifice anew from the fragments of the vast ruin by which it was surrounded:—and this it did, not indeed after the best model, but after one far preferable to what would have been followed by any other power acting in the same circumstances. LECT. V.

During such a course of affairs, philosophy, whatever injury it might inflict on Christianity, could not in itself be flourishing. Despotism, even when it stoops to patronize such matters, will surely corrupt them. Liberal pursuits may not be directly proscribed; but they have existence, in common with every thing else, only as subservient to the dominance of an individual will. Under such a shade, the growth of any thing generous must be feeble and distorted. Every branch of knowledge which, by connecting itself with the more active dispositions of mankind, becomes dangerous to the incubus of

LECT. V. irresponsible power, is discouraged or suppressed, on the obvious plea of self-preservation.

Among the Romans, the study of Grecian wisdom had barely commenced when this fate awaited it. Augustus, indeed, and several among his successors, were pleased to avow themselves patrons of philosophy; but the philosophy favoured by these princes had taken its complexion from the degraded state of their victims, its principal use being to teach the virtue of endurance. The mind, shut out from the paths which had conduced more directly to the patriotic and the generous, passed the more freely into the few and narrow channels that were still open to it; so that philosophy became to the Romans, what religion often becomes to other men, a refuge in distress. It no longer taught them how to dare, but how to submit; and contributed, along with the productions of the imagination, rather to soothe and beguile, under the weight of present evils, than to remove them. Never, except by the pencil of inspiration, was vice exhibited in colours at once so forcible and so true as by the Roman writers during this period. But their powerful abstractions of this nature, especially as presented by Seneca and Tacitus, and we should add, by Juvenal and Lucan, owe much of their vividness and strength to the fact, that in the vices thus depicted every such man saw the actual assailants of his personal liberty, and the base power which

had overshadowed the glory of his country. LECT. V.
To indulge in a gloomy reprobation of vice until it becomes personified, and then to pour out upon it the vengeance of a wounded heart, as upon some real antagonist, may seem a poor solace, but it was all that now remained to the proudest Roman.*

The emperor Adrian was a professed patron of philosophy, and frequently solicited discussion with the learned men about his court. But it soon became known, that the teacher of wisdom who should refuse the appearance of a triumph

* In the age of Augustus, the rescripts of the new sovereign were issued in place of the ordinances of the people, and acquired the force of laws;—the authority of the senate giving place in all important respects to that of the Emperors, and the people being excluded from all part in the affairs of government, and even from electing their own magistrates.

" ——— Jampridem, ex quo suffragia nulli
Vendimus, effugit curas. Nam qui dabat olim
Imperium, fasces, legiones, omnia, nunc se
Continet, atque duas tantum res anxius optat,
Panem et Circenses." Juv. Sat. X. v.

" But long, long since the times have chang'd their face,
The people grown degenerate and base;
Not suffered now the freedom of their choice,
To make their magistrates and sell their voice.
Our wise forefathers, great by sea and land,
Had once the pow'r and absolute command;
All offices of trust themselves dispos'd.
But we, who give our native rights away,
And our enslav'd posterity betray,
Are now reduc'd to beg an alms, and go
On holidays to see a puppet-show." Dryden.

LECT. V. on such occasions to his imperial master, would hazard, not only court favour, but even life itself. One of these disputants, when charged with having surrendered his point unnecessarily, is said to have replied, "Would you have me "contend a question of philology with the "master of fifty legions?"

With this anecdote, which sufficiently shows the degraded condition to which every thing intellectual was now reduced, we may connect a passing notice of Quintius Sextius, as a further illustration of this general aspect of affairs. While the republic continued, Sextius was among the most forward in supporting the liberties of his country; but the disorder and tyranny which prepared the way for the accession of Augustus filled him with despair; and, resigning his public employments, he determined that the remainder of his days should be given to philosophical studies. The man who turns his attention to philosophy as a covert from calamity, will be naturally disposed to favour the more sombre theories on the subject of human life. If the character of Sextius, as given by Seneca, be at all near the truth, the moral worth, and the power of reasoning and eloquence, which he brought to his new vocation were extraordinary. But the result of his instructions was to place the happiness of human nature in the passive, rather than the active virtues; in other words, in a mental habit which no tyranny can reach, and

not in those external means of enjoyment which tyranny, as had appeared, might readily consume. "Whatever may be my state of mind, "when I take up the writings of Sextius," says Seneca, "I confess that I never lay them down "without being ready to invite calamity, and to "exclaim, Let fortune do her worst." We need not attempt to show in what manner this feeling of stoic pride must have been defective as a means of happiness. But neither Sextius nor Seneca had any thing better to offer, when the shadows of adversity fell upon their fatherland, and were extended through all its vast dependencies.

In this brief review of the state of philosophy in the earlier ages of the Roman Empire, the object before us will require that our attention should be directed almost exclusively to the tenets of the Gnostic sects, and to those of the Alexandrian or Eclectic school. Nor is there much to regret in the necessity which lays this restriction upon us. Other sects might boast, during this period, of a few great names, and of adherents more or less numerous; but a spirit of confusion and feebleness so far descended upon them all, as not only to obliterate the old lines of demarcation between them, but to render the once venerated name of philosopher almost synonymous with that of soothsayer or magician.*

* Brucker, Hist. Crit. Philos. Tom. II. Lib. I. c. i.

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Notice of Apollonius of Tyana.

In the annals of philosophy during the first century of the christian era, there is no name so celebrated as that of Apollonius of Tyana. The inhabitants of his native city built a temple to his memory, and their conduct in this respect procured them privileges from the state. The emperor Aurelian professed to hold his character in great veneration. Adrian was at much pains in collecting his writings, and in adopting means for their preservation. From Caracalla, and Alexander Severus, he received divine honours. According to his biographers, his birth was preceded by miraculous prognostications of his future greatness; and his life, which was chiefly occupied in travelling through many countries in search of wisdom among the most famous priests and philosophers, was, according to the same authorities, an almost uninterrupted scene of supernatural vision and achievement. He had conversed with the ghost of Achilles, had seen the chains of Prometheus on Mount Caucasus, and had been often beset during his journeys in the East by pigmies and dragons, by phœnixes and satyrs, and by speaking trees. He understood the language of birds, could predict future events, heal all kinds of disease, and even raise the dead. If we suppose these marvellous relations to have been, for the most part, inventions by the admirers of this notorious personage, enough will remain to show that such was the state of the proud science of philosophy in the

apostolic age, and long subsequent, that the most general, and the most distinguished homage conferred upon it, was the acquisition of an individual in whose hands it had been of small value except as the instrument of imposture.

According to this man, whom kings so much delighted to honour, there was a certain subjection of the body, to be effected in part by abstinence, and in part by certain mystical processes, which once accomplished, the mind would become capable of conversing with the secrets of nature, and with the invisible world, in the manner pretended by this most successful of charlatans. In his notions of the Deity, Apollonius confounded the Creator with his works, which led him to adopt the doctrine of necessity;—a due acquaintance with which, he was accustomed to affirm, would be sufficient to confer on any man the power of anticipating future events.*

The great fame of Apollonius would naturally produce a host of aspirants after similar honours. From this time "lying wonders" were almost as much a matter of course in the schools of philosophy, as they had generally been in the temples of paganism. The high ground which the philosophers of Greece had so long occupied, compared with the class of men usually called to

* Philostratus, Vita Apoll. Brucker, Hist. Crit. Philos. Tom. II. Lib. I. c. ii. sect. ii. pp. 98—158. Tillemont, Histoire des Empereurs, Tom II. 125—138. Matter, Essai Historique sur l'Ecole d'Alexandrie, II. 231—234.

LECT. V. the priesthood, was far from being retained at this period; the two offices being frequently united in the same person, as was the case with Apollonius, and his successor in the path of celebrity and imposture, Lucius Apuleius.* And the time came, when the gravest philosophers did not hesitate appealing to the accounts of these men as being neither less marvellous nor less credible than the narratives of the Evangelists.† That these accounts teemed with the wonderful is admitted, but their credibility is precisely of the kind which attaches to the lives of certain saints in the middle age, of which they were not only the precursors but the models. As the more intellectual character of the ancient philosophy began to disappear, a visionary speculation and an anile credulity every where increased, disposing men to indulge in the most fanatical assumptions, and especially to attribute the most extraordinary power to the occult sciences.

Rise and character of Gnosticism.

It is to this cause especially, that we have to ascribe the origin and prevalence of Gnosticism. The extravagant theory, which in the age of the apostles, or soon afterwards, became known under this designation, was derived in part from the cabalistic dogmas of the Alexandrian Jews, in part from the leading doctrines of Platonism, but still more from that Oriental system of

* Brucker, Tom. II. 171—174.

† Mosheim, De Rebus Christian. Seculum Tertium, sect. xxi. Brucker, Tom. II. pp. 100, 137, 139.

philosophy, the nature of which we have already endeavoured to explain. The Gnosticism so intimately connected with the early history of Christianity, is distinguished from the Oriental doctrines before stated, by its larger admixture from the more fanciful conceptions of Plato, by its more visionary details with regard to celestial natures, and by its adoption of many articles of belief from the Gospels. For the christian Gnostics, as they are sometimes called, were not only believers in the existence of the two principles of good and evil, and in the gradations of Eons, or emanations proceeding from the divine nature, as taught by Zoroaster, but they learnt to speak of Christ, of the Holy Spirit, and of the Church, as belonging to this descending scale of spiritual natures. They also taught that the Saviour, as the instrument of Bythus, the supreme deity, became visible on the earth, that he might remedy the evil inflicted on the souls of men by Demiurgus, the former of the world, and procure for mankind a deliverance from their present connexion with matter, and the gift of perfection in divine knowledge, which, it was supposed, must necessarily embrace all other perfection. From this assumption as to the effect of the knowledge pursued, and from their profession that they were themselves in the only path that could lead to so valuable a possession, these persons derived their particular designation as Gnostics—a term signifying the *knowing*, or the *enlightened*.

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But with all their pretensions to knowledge, in the elysium of the Gnostics mystery was a principal element. Nothing could be more unintelligible than the matters with which their boasted knowledge was said to be conversant: such as the emanation of spiritual beings by a purely mental process from each other; their partaking of different sexes; and not only of different degrees of intelligence, but of opposite moral qualities. The desire of the Gnostic to be free from the degrading influence of matter, was with a view to his ascending in the scale of perception with regard to such subjects. Truly we may say of these men, that *professing themselves to be wise they became foolish.**

There is no direct mention of Gnosticism in the New Testament, but both St. Paul and St. John make the most emphatic allusions to it.† And

* Irenæus, Opera contra Hæreses, Lib. I. c. i.—v. et alibi. Beausobre. Histoire de Manichée, Tom. II. c. iv. et alibi. Brucker, Tom. II. pp. 641—652. Mosheim, De Rebus Christ. Seculum Primum, sect. lx.—lxiv. Tillemont, Hist. Eccles. Tom. II. pp. 40—53, 188, 254, 288. But we have no work presenting so complete a view of whatever may be known concerning the Gnostics as will be found in that of M. J. Matter, professor at Strasburgh, under the following title: — Histoire Critique du Gnosticisme, et de son Influence sur les Sectes religieuse et philosophiques des six premiers Siècles de l'Ere Chrétienne. 2 vols. Paris, 1828. Neander has also written a Development of the principal Systems of Gnosticism. Berlin, 1818; which is noticed by Matter in terms of high commendation. Pref. iv.

† 1 Tim. i. 3, 4; vi. 20. 2 Tim. ii. 16. Titus iii. 9. Col. ii. 8.

if we except the Ebionites, the heresies which agitated the church, and injured Christianity, during the first and second centuries, proceeded almost entirely from this source. The extent to which its doctrines were diffused, when we consider their contradictions and absurdities, is almost incredible. It could not have become thus prevalent had not the causes predisposing to such a result been widely spread; and their existence indicates the danger to which the *seed of the kingdom* must be exposed as deposited in such a soil: especially when it is remembered that Gnosticism was, properly, a branch of that Eclecticism which sought to propitiate all parties by adopting something from each.

Eclecticism.

The theory of the Gnostics, like that of the Eclectics, existed long before it became known by a distinctive appellation. Ammonius Sacca, under whose presidency the Eclectic school of Alexandria rose to its highest celebrity, died toward the middle of the third century. As this philosopher left nothing in writing, nearly all we know with respect to his history and doctrine is derived incidentally from the works of his disciples. This distinguished preceptor, whose chair was always surrounded by pupils both from the heathen and christian schools, was the son of christian parents, and received the rudiments of his religious and philosophical education in the christian seminary which in Alexandria had been conducted in succession by Athenagoras,

LECT. V. Pantenas, and Clemens. It was in this school that Ammonius imbibed his love of philosophical studies, and formed his purpose of attempting more than had hitherto been done in the way of purifying and assimilating the opinions and sentiments of mankind. According to his followers, this arduous enterprise was not entered upon in vain. That it procured him much applause is certain, but it appears to have occasioned the loss of his Christianity. It is not certain, indeed, nor even probable, that he ever openly renounced the faith in which he had been educated. But we are not sure that the place which he assigned to Jesus Christ was much in precedence of that which he allotted to Pythagoras and Plato.

In common with other philosophers, and in imitation of the mysteries of paganism, Ammonius taught a double doctrine, his sublimer instructions being reserved for the initiated, and delivered under the veil of an impenetrable secrecy. Concerning the nature of these sacred dogmas little is known, except as learnt from the intimations or known opinions of his pupils and successors. Among his auditors was the author of the immortal "Treatise on the Sublime." But the most distinguished persons among his more zealous adherents were Plotinus and Porphyry, men in whom that predominance of superstition and fanaticism, which had become so characteristic of the Eclectics, or the new

Platonists of Alexandria, were but too faithfully reflected.* LECT. V.

It was manifestly the ambition of Plotinus to tread in the steps of Apollonius; and could we credit the tales of Porphyry, his biographer, we must admit, with that credulous enemy of Christianity, that the powers possessed by this enthusiast were not less wonderful than those ascribed to the first preachers of the gospel. His contempt of the body, as the prison or clog of the soul, led him to neglect the means necessary for the preservation of his health, and exposed him to much suffering from premature disease and old age. Porphyry assures us, that this favourite of philosophy so far improved on his predecessors in the Platonic science of contemplation, as to have approached more nearly than any mortal had hitherto done toward the actual vision of the Infinite! We have sufficient evidence that Plotinus was often the creature of his imagination, mistaking the glare of enthusiasm for the light of truth; the visions of fancy, for the realities of reason. Such, however, was the man who, after the manner of Apollonius, obtained favour of kings, and a measure of homage which wiser and better men had failed to receive. In the philosophy to which Plotinus was devoted, the most Plotinus.

* Brucker, Hist. Crit. Philos. Tom. II. Lib. I. c. ii. sect. iv. Mosheim, De Reb. Constant. Introd. Chap. I. sect. xxx. Seculum Secundum, sect. xxv.—xxxii. Matter, Essai Historique sur l'Ecole d'Alexandrie, II. 130—137, 236—262.

LECT. V. turbulent mysticism was united with the most fraudulent pretensions to supernatural power. Such, nevertheless, was the kind of philosophy, which, in the third century, the whole world did worship. In every seat of learning it was especially favoured; and in the schools of Christianity it had its evil work to perform.*

Porphyry. Porphyry, so memorable from his enmity against Christianity, and his zeal in the cause of the established Paganism, was a favourite disciple of Plotinus. He wrote no less than fifteen treatises in opposition to the gospel. By the mistaken policy of the emperor Theodosius, all the copies of these works that could be procured were destroyed; so that our knowledge of their character can only be inferred from the fragments preserved in the writings of others, and from the few productions by the same author, which, as being less immediately directed against Christianity, were allowed to survive. It is, however, sufficiently apparent, from these sources, that Porphyry, while a man of erudition, and possessing much command of language, was one in that class of persons whose reason is constantly thrust from its place by the inroads of the imagination and the passions. We might say thus much, and leave his moral character untouched; but we cannot regard his accounts of the

* Fabricius. Biblioth. Græc. Tom. IV. 88, *et seq.* Bayle's Dict. Tom. III. Art. Plotin. Brucker, Hist. Crit. Philos. Tom. II. pp. 217—231.

marvellous as being, in all instances, the effect of credulity. Often they must have proceeded from that more doubtful source whence so many pious frauds have had their origin. In the thirty-sixth year of his age, Porphyry's impassioned Platonism taught him to meditate suicide, as the shortest avenue of escape from the prison of the body. But he lived so far to subdue the intrusions of the flesh, as to partake of special communications from heaven, and to become, in some sense, a divine person. It is from himself we learn, that in one of his sacred ecstasies, in the sixty-eighth year of his age, he was admitted to a sight of the Supreme Intelligence, the one source of gods and men, without the intervention of similitude or veil! The opinions embraced by minds of this temperament are rarely, if ever, the result of evidence. Their reason is their feeblest faculty; and they are, in consequence, wedded to misgovernment. Jamblicus, who succeeded Porphyry in office and celebrity, possessed not the eloquence of his master, but fully imbibed his mysticism, and went much beyond him in the assumption of miraculous powers.*

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Jamblicus.

But without further mention of names, it must suffice to remark, that the history of pagan philosophy from this period presents a continued deterioration of the system of Porphyry. The

* Tillemont, Hist. Emper. Tom. IV. 67—75, 611—613. Brucker, Hist. Crit. Philos. Tom. II. pp. 236—260. Matter, Essai Historique, II. 262—268.

LECT. V. short reign of Julian was not an exception in this particular. Superstition, fraud, and fanatical presumption, became more and more dominant, until it devolved on the disciples of Mohammed to sweep the whole from the earth, and, together with the fathers of the Christian Church, to give existence to that memorable result of the strength and weakness of human reason, which became known during the middle age under the name of the scholastic philosophy.

Uses of this Lecture.

This summary and consecutive view of the ancient systems of philosophy, has been rendered necessary by the manner in which the doctrines included in them have become connected with Christianity, and have proved the occasion of its injury. But the general information which it conveys, in regard to the character and history of the human mind, should not be uninteresting. We yield to vulgar delusion, if we suppose that these by-gone opinions are matters with which we can have no practical concern. The records of folly and extravagance may suggest the lessons of wisdom and moderation. They are beacons along the troubled sea we have to navigate; and which, so far from being valueless, may prove the most efficient means of our personal safety. To be unacquainted with these instances of failure or excess, when forming a judgment on the general capability of the human mind, must be to conclude from partial premises, and to conclude, in consequence, defectively, often

erroneously. The many aberrations on the subject of religion, and on many other matters, in our own time, are really little else than a recurrence of former errors, and a recurrence of them which might not have taken place, at least to the same extent, if the instruction furnished by the past had been duly improved. When, for example, we see our contemporaries ensnared by pretenders to supernatural powers and special inspiration; when we see the most ascetic airs of spirituality, accompanied with an habitual indulgence of the most malevolent passions; when we find the loftiest elements of pride concealed under the garb of a lowly insignificance; is it nothing to know that these are only some of the forms which human nature has been ever assuming, sometimes in connexion with the true religion, sometimes with the false, and sometimes without the aid of any religious influence whatsoever? Man is, indeed, a mysterious being—his heart, *who can know it?* The web of his mental and moral state is always woven from innumerable threads; and those who have studied his history the most are most convinced that in more than one respect he is *fearfully and wonderfully made.* A sense of our common danger should induce a common sympathy, and lead us not only to implore the divine guidance for ourselves, but to intercede with the tenderest solicitude for such as may have erred from the truth.

LECT. V.

Sceptical method of exhibiting this subject exceedingly disingenuous.

But from the review to which this Lecture has been devoted, we have, in conclusion, to observe, that nearly all the error, whether speculative or practical, that has been imputed to our early Christianity as its peculiar possession, had long been established in the schools of the most renowned of its adversaries.* It is not true, as often insinuated, that the term philosophy was significant in those ages of large and generous thought. On the contrary, it was applied to a state of things in which all, and more than all, those corruptions and imbecilities with which the sceptic affects to be so scandalized as connected with the church, were constantly presenting themselves. There is an end that may be answered by using the term philosophy as descriptive of whatever is elevated in human intelligence, and by giving all the credit of such intelligence to the early opponents of the gospel. It is possible to bestow a laboured prominence on the growing corruptions of Christianity upon the one hand, and to throw a veil of concealment over the vicious and pitiable exhibitions of the schools of philosophy on the other, so as to make it appear that the struggle which issued in favour of the church, was one in which an enlightened philanthropy became prostrate before the power of a degrading

* "Upon a full inspection, it will be seen that the corruption of Christianity was itself the effect of that vitiated state of the human mind, of which the vices of the government were the primary cause."—Edinburgh Review, Vol. XXIII. p. 238.

superstition. All this it may be expedient to do; but a theory more contrary to fact the arts of perfidy could not readily devise. It was not from Christianity that the morals or religion of the Roman empire derived their corruption. The people who could bow so submissively to the yoke of Nero, and who, from the highest to the lowest, could render divine honours to such pretenders as Apollonius, had little to lose in the way of public spirit, and could not well be more enslaved to superstition. We could wish that Christianity had remained free from the dreams of mysticism, from the excesses of monkery, from the wiles of imposture, and from all the debilitating effects of superstitious illusion. But we may also extend our benevolent sympathies a little further, and lament that the same honourable exemption should be so much wanting in the systems of Apuleius and Plotinus, among the sophists of Julian, and even in Julian himself.*

* Julian spent his winter nights in publishing, with the advantage of his name and office, the long-exploded arguments of Celsus, Hierocles, and Porphyry, against Christianity, adopting the credulous superstition of those writers as his own. The "Eulogium on the Mother of the Gods" (Orat. V.) affords sufficient proof of the extravagance in which this otherwise extraordinary person could sometimes indulge. Julian is regarded by Gibbon with the fondness of favouritism; but it is thus the historian is constrained to speak of him:—"The pious Emperor condescends to relate, "without a blush, and without a smile, the voyage of the "goddess from the shores of Pergamos to the mouth of the "Tiber; and the stupendous miracle which convinced the "senate and people of Rome that the lump of clay which

LECT. V. Known, and never forgotten, should it be, that the philosophy of the schools with which these names are connected, embraced all the vices which proved most hostile to the purity of our religion; that in those schools these evils were especially generated; and that from thence they too soon passed into the high places of the church. The object of the two ensuing Lectures will be to show the truth of this general statement.

" their ambassadors transported over the seas, was endowed " with life and sentiment, and divine power. For the truth " of this prodigy he appeals to the public monuments of the " city; and censures, with some acrimony, the sickly and " affected taste of those men who impertinently derided the " sacred tradition of their ancestors."

LECTURE VI.

ON THE CORRUPTION OF CHRISTIANITY FROM THE INFLUENCE OF GENTILE PHILOSOPHY.

LECTURE VI.

COLOSSIANS II. 8.

Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.

Character of the Fathers as Defenders of Christianity.

THAT the christian religion suffered much from the influence of Gentile philosophy is unquestionable. But the extent to which this was the fact, and, still more, the matters that may be selected as affording the most striking illustrations of the injury thus sustained, are points on which a great difference of judgment subsists. Indeed, there are few questions demanding more candour, discrimination, and acquaintance with ancient learning, than the one relating to the degree in which an improper influence was conceded to the prejudices of pagan wisdom by the early professors of Christianity. That it behoved the defenders of the christian doctrine in those ages to conciliate the array of power and learning opposed to them by every means consistent with a due regard to truth, will be

LECT. VI. admitted by every mind capable of reflection. But we find this general admission of small avail in particular cases; the concession applauded by one man being as loudly censured by another. The reason is obvious:—the instance adduced lends a sanction to some favourite opinion or usage in one quarter, while in the other its effect is just of an opposite description. Thus each man views the adoption of foreign speculation as commendable whenever such speculation happens to have been approved by himself; and makes it matter of impeachment when devoid of such ground of recommendation. On this subject nearly all parties agree in casting much reproach on the Fathers; but it is a reproach which, from these causes, is of various amount, and variously applied.

Their conduct often unfairly judged.

The deficiencies and faults which belong undoubtedly to this class of writers, are formidable enough, without making their good sense and humanity, as is often done, a ground of accusation. Justin Martyr addressed an apology in the cause of his persecuted fellow-Christians to the Emperor Antoninus Pius, who boasted in the name of philosopher, as well as of being the father of his people. In the course of this address, the apologist justifies himself in calling the Redeemer the Son of God, by observing, that such language should not be deemed strange by men "who were wont to speak of Jupiter "as having sons, and especially of Mercury

"as his Interpreter, and the Instructor of all "men." Again he remarks, "if Christ be a "mere man, yet he deserves to be called the "Son of God on account of his wisdom, the "ancients describing their Jupiter as the father "of gods and men; and if in an extraordinary "manner he be the logos of God, this is in "common with those who call Mercury the "logos, he declaring the will of God." Now these passages are cited by Dr. Priestley, and by some less prejudiced writers before him, as demonstrating the readiness of Justin to modify, and even to merge, the doctrines of the gospel, in compliance with popular humour, or the taste of the learned.* But the conclusion in this instance may be fairly regarded as not altogether warranted by the premises. LECT. VI.

When the principle on which an obnoxious doctrine is founded is admitted by the opponents of that doctrine, there is not necessarily any abandonment of that principle in the method of reminding such opponents of their inconsistency in this particular which our apologist chose to adopt. Nothing, as every one knows, is more common or more legitimate than this manner of reasoning. The object of Justin, in the passages adduced, was simply to show, that, whatever might be his real doctrine, the parties objecting to the language he had employed

* History of the Corruptions of Christianity, I. 33. Casaubon, *in loc.* Daille's Use of the Fathers.

LECT. VI. were condemned out of their own mouth. Similar passages are continually quoted from the Fathers as betraying a disposition to corrupt the truths of our religion in the hope of procuring it a more general acceptance. That there were instances in which a compromise of this injurious nature occurred is not denied; but even in these cases, it is far from being in our power to determine the amount of culpable motive that may have been in exercise; and it must ever be incumbent upon us to distinguish between such excesses, and a laudable attempt to render the acknowledged principles of mankind subservient to the peculiar claims of Christianity.

Indeed, it remains to be shown that there was any thing in the conduct of the early ecclesiastical writers in appealing to the analogies of pagan philosophy, and even of Paganism itself, in aid of revealed truth, that is not in agreement with the use of analogy, as deduced for the same purpose from the systems of nature and providence. There should be no more to condemn, in this particular, in the conduct of Justin Martyr, or Origen, while kept within its proper limits, than in that of Bishop Butler, in his "Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed;" or in that of Dr. Shuttleworth, in his "Consistency of Revelation with Itself, and with Human Reason." The great design of both these writers is to lead the mind from the

known to the unknown; or to make the truth confessed subserve the admission of higher but kindred truths which are disputed. And what bears immediately on this point, there is a passage in Origen which is of itself competent to have suggested the whole theory of the "Analogy of Religion," and which, moreover, is so noticed by Bishop Butler himself, as almost to warrant a belief that such was the fact. "He who believes the Scripture to have pro-"ceeded from Him who is the Author of "Nature," says that Father, "may well expect "to find the same sort of difficulties in it as are "found in the constitution of nature."* Thus Origen was concerned to make precisely that use of the constitution and the course of nature, which the ancient christian writers in general were disposed to make of the received systems both of philosophy and religion. The appeal to the one and the other was on the same principle—to silence objections, as an important advance toward the establishment of truth. In a word, had these persons determined not to avail themselves, in this manner, of the truth discoverable either in the philosophy or the paganism of their times, such a defect would have been more to

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* Χρὴ μέν τοι γε τὸν ἅπαξ παραδεξάμενον τοῦ πτισαντὸς τὸν κόσμον εἶναι ταύτας τὰς γραφὰς πεπεῖσθαι, ὅτι ὅσα περὶ τῆς κτίσεως ἁπαντᾶ τοῖς ζητοῦσι τὸν περὶ αὐτῆς λόγον, ταῦτα καὶ περὶ τῶ γραφῶν.—Philocal. p. 23. Ed. Cant.

LECT. VI. their discredit than some excess on the opposite side. A poet of our own has said,

> Seize on truth where'er 'tis found,
> On Christian or on Heathen ground.

Their general conduct characterized by fearlessness and integrity.

Nor must we leave this subject without observing, that the writers who are charged with having accommodated the doctrines of Holy Writ to the preconceptions of the heathen, so as to have changed their character, protest loudly against all such temporizing; and their language in this respect is accompanied by much that seems to bespeak its sincerity.* In the very Apology of

* It is in the following terms that Tertullian speaks of the paramount authority of revelation, and of the evils to be apprehended, and which had actually resulted in his day, from an undue influence of philosophy. "Nobis vero nihil "ex nostro arbitrio inducere licet, sed nec eligere quod "aliquis de arbitrio suo induxerit. Apostolos Domini "habemus auctores, qui nec ipsi quidquam ex suo arbitrio, "quod inducerent, elegerunt; sed acceptam à Christo disci- "plinam fideliter nationibus adsignaverunt.—Ea est materia "sapientiæ secularis, temeraria interpres divinæ naturæ et "dispositionis. Ipsæ denique hereses à philosophia sub- "ornantur. Inde Æones, et formæ nescio quæ, et trinitas "hominis apud Valentinum: Platonicus fuerat. Inde "Marcionis Deus melior de tranquilitate: à Stoicis venerat. "Et ut anima interire dicatur, ab Epicureis observatur. Et "ut carnis restitutio negetur, de una omnium philosophorum "schola sumitur. Et ubi materia cum Deo æquatur, Zenonis "disciplina est: et ubi aliquid de igneo Deo allegatur, "Heraclitus intervenit. Eadem materia apud hæreticos et "philosophos volutatur, idem retractatus implicantur. Unde "malum, et quare? et unde homo, et quomodo? et quod "proxime Valentinus proposuit, unde Deus? Scilicet de "ethymesi, et ectromate. Miserum Aristotelem! qui illis

Justin whence those extracts are taken on which Dr. Priestley's accusation is founded, the writer is careful to affirm that in appealing to certain preconceived notions of men as in accordance with the leading facts of Christianity, he is far from meaning to rest the claims of that divine system on the strength, or even on the existence, of any such similarities. Its great claim he declared to be in its own transcendent character, "in its being the truth, and nothing but the truth." LECT. VI.

Justin's theory, moreover, as to the origin of all such resemblances, which is largely and

"dialecticam instituit, artificem struendi et destruendi, "versipellem in sententiis, coactam in conjecturis, duram in "argumentis, operariam contentionum, molestam etiam sibi "ipsi, omnia retractantem, ne quid omnino tractaverit. Hinc "illæ fabulæ, et genealogiæ interminabiles, et quæstiones "infructuosæ, et sermones serpentes velut cancer; à quibus "nos Apostolus refrenans, nominatim philosophiam contes-"tatur caveri oportere, scribens ad Colossenses: Videte ne "quis vos circumveniat per philosophiam, et inanem seduc-"tionem, secundum traditionem hominum, præter provi-"dentiam Spiritus sancti. Fuerat Athenis, et istam "sapientiam humanam, affectatricem, et interpolatricem "veritatis, de congressibus noverat, ipsam quoque in suas "hæreses multipartitam varietate sectarum invicem repug-"nantium. Quid ergo Athenis et Hierosolymis? quid "Academiæ et Ecclesiæ? quid hæreticis et Christianis? "Nostra institutio de porticu Salomonis est, qui et ipse "tradiderat Dominum in simplicitate cordis esse quærendum. "Viderint qui Stoicum et Platonicum et Dialecticum Chris-"tianismum protulerunt. Nobis curiositate opus non est "post Christum Jesum, nec inquisitione post Evangelium. "Cum credimus, nihil desideramus ultra credere. Hoc enim "priùs credimus, non esse quod ultra credere debeamus."— Opera. Præscript. Hereticor. 204, 205.

LECT. VI. repeatedly stated, must have been far from acceptable to the parties whom he is described as so anxious to please. Every gleam of truth that had crossed the darkness of the Gentile schools of philosophy, he claims as having emanated from revelation; while not a few of the particulars in the established paganism which he notices as analogous to certain parts of the christian system, he denounces as the inventions of devils, who by this clumsy anticipation of the advent, and of the events connected with it as foretold by the prophets, would fain have counteracted the work of redemption, introducing a pseudo-gospel, so that no space might be left for the propagation of the true.* Nothing need be said about the wisdom or the folly of this doctrine; it is adduced to show the injustice of that fashion which has taught a multitude of flippant persons to connect every weakness observable in the writings of the Fathers with some disingenuous and interested motive. The man who could give utterance to these obnoxious opinions at the foot of the throne, while that worst of all heathen persecutors, a *philosophical* persecutor sat upon it, and who could reiterate them in the face of the empire, is a person who should not be lightly

* Justin. Opera. Apology II. pp. 81, 89—95. The same theory is frequently broached by Tertullian, and indeed by nearly all the earlier Fathers. Tertul. Opera. Apol. pp. 21, 22, 36, 37. De Præscript. Hæreticor. c. vii. xl. De Spectaculis, c. xxiii. Clement of Alexandria adopted this opinion from Philo Judæus, Lib. II. c. v. 439. Ed. Potterian.

charged with having done the office of sycophant or traitor when avowing himself a disciple and advocate of the christian religion; especially when it is remembered that the hour of trial found this same man possessed of integrity enough, and courage enough, to deserve the honour so long rendered to his memory by the faithful as Justin the *Martyr*. LECT. VI.

The substance of these somewhat exculpatory remarks might be extended from Justin to several others with whom his name is connected in ecclesiastical history. Indeed there are facts which seem to warrant the conclusion, that the errors of these ancients, in whatever they may be thought to consist, were very rarely the effect altogether, or in any large degree, of those faithless and worldly intentions which have been so freely imputed to them. Their conclusions may often be such as *we* could not adopt without doing violence to what we deem the most obvious dictates of evidence and reason. But the circumstances of the early Fathers were so widely different from our own, that any reasoning from our condition to that of such men must necessarily be very imperfect and uncertain.

Not to dwell, however, on this point, it is impossible that a devout mind should be conversant with these writers, when addressing themselves to the defence of Christianity, without deploring that so much more time should have been employed by them in combating the follies

LECT. VI. and contradictions of philosophers, or in exposing the vices and absurdities of Paganism, than in expounding and vindicating the doctrines of revelation. While professing to confine themselves to the defensive, they are continually deserting that ground, and never seem more in earnest than when directing the weapons of reason or ridicule against some favourite opinion or custom of their philosophical or pagan adversaries. Judging from the tone in which their conduct as theologians has been frequently adverted to in recent times, we should hardly suppose that whatever is most expressive of censure or contempt in regard to Gentile philosophy or Pagan worship in the language of modern writers, might be paralleled, in a multitude of passages, from the works of the christian Fathers of the first three centuries,—men who thus wrote at the hazard, not only of their fame as scholars, but of their lives as subjects. Such, however, is the fact; so much so, that Gibbon complains of "the superfluous wit" which, on these subjects, they had ever at command. And there certainly were occasions when, as we have intimated, it would perhaps have been well if their disposition to indulge in sarcasm, and to dwell on the ludicrous in the systems of their opponents, had been somewhat more restrained. Or it may have been necessary that they should aim thus beyond the mark in order to reach it. Nevertheless, men were not wanting, from the

earliest age to that of Augustine, who charged the christian doctors with having borrowed their leading tenets from the philosophy of Plato; but this the Christians of those times indignantly denied, retorting on their adversaries the charge of a previous theft.* LECT. VI.

The nature of the subject before us will require that our future references to the Fathers should be more in the way of condemnation than approval; and this circumstance has made it proper that we should endeavour, as a preliminary matter, to distinguish between their real faults, and such as mere ignorance or prejudice has imputed to them. They erred often and greatly, as we shall presently see; but the man who shall insinuate that their attachment to christian truth was so feeble as to allow of their sacrificing it deliberately and systematically on the altar of a worldly expediency, must be wanting either in the means or the disposition requisite to the formation of a sound judgment on the subject.

Justin Martyr has suffered as much from insinuations of this sort as any man. It is in the following language, however, that he speaks, when appealing to Antoninus Pius, and to his sons Verissimus, and Lucius the philosopher, against the wrongs inflicted on the "suffering multitude" of his brethren. "Reason affirms,"

* Augustin. De Doctrin. Lib. II. c. 2. Augustinus Paulino, Ep. 33.

LECT. VI. he observes, "that those who are truly pious, "and truly philosophers, are bound to regard "the truth alone as precious, and to render it "the greatest honour; abandoning opinions, "however ancient, when shown to be depraved. "Nor is this all; sound reason teaches that we "should be no parties with men who do unjustly, "but that every lover of truth should choose to "speak and act in all things according to truth, "in the face of all possible consequences, even "of death itself. The names by which it is "your pleasure to be every where known, are "the *pious*, the *philosophical*, the *guardians of* "*justice*, and the *lovers of learning*. How far "these titles are borne consistently, facts shall "determine. For we are far from meaning to "approach you in the language of flattery, or "to seek favour by such means. We come to "demand that justice — justice the most im- "partial—and nothing more, may be done: that "no judgment may be pronounced upon us in "prejudice, from a desire of pleasing superstitious "men; nor in blind passion, devoid of reason, "the mind being long occupied by evil reports. "And this we demand, lest in so judging us, "you judge yourselves. For our doctrine "teaches us that we suffer nothing in *bearing* "evil; the only harm that can befall us, is in "*yielding* to it. It is in your power to destroy, "it is not in your power to injure."* It was

* Apology, II. 53, 54.

not often that language of this just and intrepid character was addressed to such ears. The sentiments generally expressed by these venerable apologists on the subject of religious freedom, were far nobler than had been hitherto professed by any class of men. But they often proved worse than useless, as commended to the notice of authorities which knew nothing of religion except as a branch of civil obedience. Tertullian declares it to be "a matter of right, naturally "belonging to every human being, to worship "the God in whom he believes; and that it "can be no part of one man's religion to coerce "the religion of another; since religion, if not "received voluntarily, is not received at all."* But while we are refreshed by the intelligence and philanthropy of such convictions, and admire the leonine courage which avows them, we have to lament that they were too much in advance of the times to obtain any candid attention either in the schools of the learned or in the high places of power.†

* Ad Scapul. c. 2.

† It is no matter of conjecture what the fate of Origen would have been had he lived under the last of the Tudors, and dared to express himself to the following effect :—"Volens "Celsus invidiam Christianismo conflare, quod fœdera inter "se clam ineant Christiani legibus vetita, hoc primum ait "alia esse fœdera quæ fiunt palam, alia quæ occulte: illa "legibus permitti, hæc legibus prohibita. Nempe vult in "eam quam Christiani mutuam vocant Agapen, odium "excitare, quasi communis periculi causa instituta fuerit, et "validior sit omni sacramento. Quoniam igitur jactitat pub-

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Effect of philosophy on the modes of Biblical interpretation.

II. In adverting to the ancient Philosophy as a source of corruption to Christianity, the manner in which it favoured the introduction of UNSOUND METHODS OF SCRIPTURAL INTERPRETATION should be first noticed.

The fourfold method of exposition.

Egypt, the country in which the earliest attempt was made to destroy the adherents of revealed religion, was also the place in which, at a later period, it was especially corrupted. It was in Egypt particularly, that the interpretation of Scripture in the several senses called allegorical, tropical, and anagogical, were so added to the literal rendering as to become a kind of system.* What we are to understand by the

" licam legem, et illam violari dicit Christianorum fœderibus, " respondendum est, quemadmodum si quis apud Scythas " peregrinus qui nefariis legibus utuntur, nullam inde dis- " cedendi occasionem reperiret, cogereturque inter eos vivere, " is profecto ut pareat veritatis legi quam illi nefariam putant, " jure cum iis qui eadem secum sentirent, fœdera iniret legibus " Sycthárum vetita : sic apud veritatem judicem illas gentium " leges quæ statuarum cultum sanciunt, et inducta deorum " multitudine Deum è medio tollunt, leges esse Scythicas, aut " si quid est legibus Scythiciis irreligiosius. Non igitur ab- " surdum est fœdera contra leges inire, veritatis defendendæ " causa. Sicut enim si qui clam fœdera inter se inirent ut " Tyrannum urbem invadentem è medio tollant, illi recte face- " rent; ita Christiani, diabolo mendacioque apud ipsos tyranni- " dem exercentibus, merito, etiam perfractis diaboli legibus, " contra diabolum ipsum fœdera ineunt, sicque dant operam " eorum saluti quibus persuaderi potest, ut hanc veluti Scy- " thicam et tyrannicam legem executiant."— Opera. Contrà Celsus, 319, 320.

* Mosheim. De Rebus ante Constant. Seculum II. sect. xxxiii.

literal and allegorical sense, cannot need explanation. The tropical related to the proper interpretation of the figurative language of Scripture:—as when the Redeemer speaks of himself as the *vine*, and the *door;* and of his body, saying, *Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up again.* The anagogical, was what we call the spiritual mode of interpretation, designed to elicit the spiritual meaning contained, or supposed to be contained, in the allusions, events, and institutions of Scripture.

This method of exposition not faulty in itself.

Now it is admitted, that the complete explanation of Scripture will require the frequent aid of all these methods. It abounds in figurative language; there is also a peculiar spiritual meaning to be very often attached to it; and when it is remembered that the parables are of the nature of allegories, it must be obvious that the allegorical sense may not be dispensed with. It is not, then, to the rules of interpretation now enumerated, considered in themselves, that we object, but simply to a particular manner of applying them. Truth may become error by being pushed to extremes, and the soundest canon of criticism will become a treacherous guide if carried to excess.

Its great principles much older than the christian era.

The extent to which this mode of expounding the Scriptures was carried by Origen, the great luminary among christian teachers in the third century, has led to its being frequently described

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as an invention of that writer. But in this respect, as in many others, Origen did nothing more than give the influence of his powerful name to what had already very generally obtained. Nor is it enough to say that Origen's principles of interpretation were in substance those of Justin Martyr, of Clemens Alexandrinus, of Philo Judæus, and of some other writers in the first and second centuries. The sources of this stream, which did so much to poison the fountains of sacred knowledge, are still more remote. Before the age of Philo, both the Pharisees and the Essenes had indulged much in such methods of explaining, or rather obscuring the sacred writings; nor is it easy to conceive how the Sadducees could have maintained their most unscriptural creed while professing to believe the Scriptures, except by some such means.* Through the Gentile world, especially among the Greeks, the doctrines of religion and philosophy were all so propounded as to be inseparable from allegory and mysticism, if they were to be made at all intelligible. What semblance of the reasonable could be given to the mythology of Greece without the assistance of allegory; or to the imaginative creations of the Orientalist without the help of mysticism?

Prevalence of allegory and mysticism among the pagan Platonists.

It may be proper in this place to adduce some illustrations of the manner in which the pagan

* Mosheim. De Rebus. ante Constant. Secul. II. sect. xxxiv. III. sect. xxviii.

Platonists were accustomed to avail themselves both of allegory and mysticism in their philosophical comments on the popular mythology. Thus one expounder of "the judgment of Paris" observes, "In this fable, which is of the mixed "kind, it is said that Discord, at a banquet of "the gods, threw a golden apple; and that a "dispute about it arising among the goddesses, "they were sent by Jupiter to the judgment "of Paris, who, charmed with the beauty of "Venus, gave her the apple in preference to "the rest. But this banquet denotes the super-"mundane powers of the gods, and on this "account they subsist in conjunction with each "other. And the golden apple denotes the "world, which, on account of its composition "from contrary natures, is not improperly said "to be thrown by Discord, or Strife. Again, "however, since different gifts are imparted to "the world by different gods, they appear to "contest with each other for the apple. And "a soul living according to sense, (for this is "Paris,) not perceiving other powers in the "universe, says, that the beauty of Venus alone "is the contended apple."* Another in this class of writers observers, "Geographers assert "that the islands of the blessed are about the "ocean, and that souls depart thither which "have lived well. This however is absurd, for "souls would then have a stormy life. What LECT. VI.

* See the Metamorphosis of Apuleius, by Taylor, 93.

LECT. VI. " then shall we say? The solution is this. Phi-
" losophers assimilate the life of men to the sea,
" because it is turbulent, prolific, bitter, and
" laborious. But as islands are raised above
" the sea, they call that polity which transcends
" the present life, the islands of the blessed, and
" these are the same as the Elysian fields. On
" this account also, Hercules accomplished his
" last labour in the Hesperian regions, signifying
" by this, that having vanquished a dark and
" terrestial life, he afterwards lived in day, that
" is, in truth and light."* On these passages

* Ibid. 265. from Olympiodorus in MSS. Schol. in Gorgiam Platonis. " The work," says Bishop Marsh, " in which this " species of allegorical interpretation was first employed was " the Iliad of Homer: and a collection of allegorical expo- " sitions is still extant, which has been published under the " title *Heraclidis Allegoriæ Homericæ*. It is true that the " actions ascribed to the heroes of the Iliad cannot be " regarded as *real* history; that they cannot be regarded as " a journal of events which actually happened before the " walls of Troy. But the author certainly meant that they " should assume the *character* of real events. For unless " the descendants of those heroes could have *supposed*, at " least, that they were reading the actions of their ancestors, " the Iliad would never have become a *national poem*. " There was nothing, therefore, in the *character* of these " actions at all resembling *allegorical* representation, a repre- " sentation which not only *professes* to be a picture of the " imagination, but a picture introduced merely for the sake " of *another* picture that *resembles* it. Nor were the " actions ascribed even to the *deities* of the Iliad, any other " than such as accorded with the superstition of the age, " and to the *original* readers exceeded not the bounds of " *credibility*. But when the savage manners of the ancient " heroes became offensive to the polished Greeks of later

it must suffice to remark, that while the wisest of the Greeks claimed this latitude of interpretation on such subjects, the Orientalists assumed even a greater license; and it must be evident that the same liberty being conceded in the exposition of Scripture, there could be no doctrine which the Bible might not be made to teach.

These principles owe much of their form and influence to the Eclectics.

A circumstance which conduced much to the form and prevalence of the principles now under consideration, was the progress of the Eclectic spirit. The great object of Eclecticism was to bring about a union of matters, described as having a kindred relation to each other, but which were, in fact, of the most heterogeneous description; and that this object might be secured, some such means of transmutation as this theory of interpretation presented was strictly necessary. By this process, the discordant notes of wisdom and folly, of truth and falsehood, were so modulated and blended together, as to lose their separate and proper character. Such was the plastic power of this instrument, that it could

" ages, and the mythology of Homer became disgusting to " those who had been educated in the schools of Aristotle " and Plato, the commentators on Homer had recourse to the " expedient of *allegorical* interpretation. Unable to defend " him by a *literal* exposition, yet unwilling to abandon a " national author, whom the Greeks had ever holden in the " highest veneration, his philosophic interpreters drew the " veil of allegory over the actions of the Iliad, and repre- " sented them thus disguised, as the depositories of sublime " and mysterious truths."—Lectures on the Criticism and Interpretation of the Bible, 358, 359.

LECT. VI. engraft or exclude at pleasure, and educe the appearance of order from the wildest confusion.*

As Christianity became more generally professed, another attempt in the work of amalgamation became requisite; and it was no little change that passed on the new system, and on those with which it was brought into contact, in consequence of the relation in which they were placed to each other. Many terms in the Platonic nomenclature were displaced by others borrowed from Christianity, and many even of the tenets of Platonicism were so explained and modified as to be more in accordance with it. But from the same cause the doctrines of revelation would be exposed to the same treatment, and a similar impression was in fact made both upon their language and their substance. The doctrine of the Trinity was attempted to be explained on the principle of the three *hypostaces*, or natures, in the Deity, as taught by Plato. The predictions of Scripture with regard to the destruction of the world by fire, and the resurrection of the body, were so allegorized as merely to denote that philosophical purification of the moral system which had been generally taught in the schools of Greece. And, on the same principle, the doc-

* Clemens Alexandrinus defines this system as embracing the whole circle of knowlege, rendered subservient to truth.—Stromatum, Lib. I. 291.

trine of Scripture in reference to the new birth was explained as meaning little more than an ascendency of the rational over the sensual, the government of a depraved body by an enlightened soul, a consummation which the wisest among the Gentiles had always professed themselves to be earnestly coveting.* It was in this manner that the distinguishing truths of Christianity were corrupted by the ancient philosophy, not borrowed from it; a distinction of material import, and which admits of ample proof.

We have already observed that the early Fathers were not disposed to confess any obligation to the schools of philosophy with respect to the slightest portion of their creed; and that, on the contrary, they were wont to regard every thing true in the notions of philosophers, as borrowed, directly or indirectly, from the writings of Moses and the prophets. As the consequence of this doctrine, it became expedient that every thing deemed reasonable in the systems of pagan wisdom, should be found, by some means, in the Bible; and in making these discoveries, the most unauthorized modes of explaining the records of inspiration became indispensable. But we must pass from the *sources* of this evil, to notice a few instances illustrating the kind of injury which its prevalence served to inflict on Christianity.

* Clemens. Stromat. Lib. V. 211, 647, 710, et alibi.

LECT. VI.

Injury resulting from the manner in which these principles were generally applied.

It has been stated that the christian Fathers Pantænus and Clement were successively presidents in the Christian Catechetical School of Alexandria. In that seminary the youth of christian families were taught the lessons of religion and philosophy; and its teachers, by moulding the character of the more intellectual of their pupils to their pleasure, gave to the Christianity of the third century much of that impure complexion by which it was distinguished.

Notice of Pantænus.

Not a single production from the prolific pen of Pantænus is now extant. We learn, however, from Clement, that one of his favourite laws of criticism on the Scriptures was to confound the distinction between the past and future tenses. By this means the language of the prophets, and even the most simple statements of historical fact, were made susceptible of almost any application that fancy might suggest, or inclination demand: the passages recording what the Almighty had done, becoming, as occasion required, so many predictions as to what he meant to do. Let only this assumption be granted, in the unrestricted form in which it is said to have been adopted by Pantænus, and there is no portion of the sacred volume so obvious in its meaning as to be secure.

Of Clemens Alexandrinus.

Clement was the disciple as well as the successor of Pantænus, and followed the example

* Mosheim, De Rebus ante Constant. Seculum II. sect. xxxiii.

of his master as an interpreter of the inspired writings. He wrote commentaries on nearly all the books of Scripture, but a small part only of his works has descended to us. From these remains we learn, that one of Clement's favourite maxims was, that the study of philosophy should not only accompany the study of divinity, but even precede it; and in one instance an appeal is made to a passage of scripture history in support of this opinion. In the account of Sarah and Agar, Clement finds every thing necessary for his purpose. In Abraham, he saw the representative of a divinely-taught believer in the gospel; in Sarah, the emblem of christian wisdom, or divinity; and in Agar, the personification of human wisdom, or philosophy. Abraham lived long in a wedded state with Sarah, but remained childless,—a circumstance which was meant to teach, that the mind, to become fruitful, must not be conversant with christian wisdom, or divinity, alone. The history which states that Abraham afterwards took Agar to himself, with the consent of Sarah, is explained as teaching that men may study pagan philosophy with the full consent of christian theology. The birth of Isaac by Sarah was subsequent to the birth of Ishmael by Agar, and this fact is said to show that the men who give their attention to profane as well as sacred studies are alone capable of becoming spiritual fathers in the church, their efforts as philosophers being

LECT. VI. necessary to their success as divines.* These remarks, considered as a specimen of biblical criticism, require little observation. That a considerable attention to philosophy might be highly useful to the student of theology, no intelligent man could dispute; but the doctrine which seemed to set forth the latter as wholly dependent on the former for its efficiency, was at once false and pernicious; while nothing could be more perilous than the practice which should expose the youthful mind to the snare of the strongest prejudice in favour of the speculations of men, before bringing it to the business of inquiry about the truth of God.

It was a leading doctrine of Platonism that the world partakes of a twofold character,—the visible and the invisible; or, in other words, that it consists of things which are ascertained by the senses, and of things which are seen only by the intellect. Clement approved this doctrine, and inferred, as a matter of course, that it had been taken from the Scriptures. Nor was he at a loss in fixing on the precise source of the plagiarism. The doctrine of Plato with regard to the intellectual character of the world, a view of it always far removed from vulgar apprehension,

* Stromatum, Lib. I. 333. Clemens had found many instances of this kind of interpretation, and quite to this extent of extravagance, in the Epistle of Barnabas—a work which he attributed to the Barnabas mentioned in Scripture. Nor were such specimens wanting in Theophilus of Antioch.

he discovered in the words of the sacred historian when describing the earth as *without form, and void* (or invisible). The sensible world, with which alone the perceptions of men in general are conversant, was supposed to have been called into existence when God said, *Let there be light.**

It was, moreover, the doctrine of Clement, that the laws of Moses are all susceptible of four kinds of interpretation. Beside the literal meaning, mention is made of the spiritual, the practical, and the prophetic, all of which the studious may discover. The spiritual sense he frequently carried to the excess of Cabalistic mysticism; while to detect practical lessons where it was not the object of the inspired writer to convey them, and to make plain the prophecies contained in the precepts of the decalogue, required, as we may suppose, the utmost effort of invention. There is, no doubt, a spiritual, or an evangelical, as well as a literal signification that should be attached, under certain restrictions, to the Mosaic ritual. It will be admitted, also, that the positive institutions of the Hebrew lawgiver have an intimate connexion with the great doctrines of moral obligation, and that inasmuch as they were *shadows of good things to come*, there is a prophetic sense involved in them. But the manner in which these general principles were systematized and

* Stromat. Lib. V. 702.

LECT. VI. applied by Clement, rendered the communications of Heaven liable to all kinds of misconstruction.

Justin Martyr. As an expositor of Scripture, Justin Martyr was a man of singular sobriety and accuracy, if compared with Clement of Alexandria. Instances of fanciful interpretation are not indeed unfrequent in the writings of this Father, but these occur as exceptions, not as the rule.

Origen. It would be well if we could so speak of Origen. But the works of this renowned author, amid the many proofs they afford of his extraordinary learning and genius, of his almost incredible industry, and, we may add, of his ardent religious feeling, became the depository of almost every possible extravagance in regard to the manner of elucidating the sacred writings. It was his frequent charge against the philosophers, that they attempted to conceal the absurdities of the established religion under the veil of allegory and mysticism, and it was with justice that he was often censured, in his turn, as resorting to the same means in his defence of the gospel.*

* He touches on this point with some warmth more than once in his answer to Celsus. "Postea criminatur Moysis "libros, et culpat eos qui tropologiis, et allegoriis illos inter- "pretantur. Hic merito quis roget egregium illum hominem "et suum librum veri sermonis titulo ornantem. Quid, o "bone! deos, qui in tales inciderunt casus quales sapientes "tui poëtæ ac philosophi describunt, qui detestabilibus "spurcitiis se fœdaverunt, qui cum suis parentibus bello "gesserunt, qui eorum virilia amputaverunt, glorialis talia "memorari ausos esse, perpetrasse, pertulisse: à Moyse "autem deceptos et in errorem inductos putas qui se ejus

Probable motives of Origen in adopting his theory of scripture interpretation.

There are two motives by which Origen appears to have been especially influenced in adopting this course. In the first place, it promised him assistance in meeting certain curious objections urged by unbelievers; and it was not usual in that age to suppose that religion could include any thing in its own nature inexplicable. In the next place, it was strictly necessary, in order that he might discover in the Scriptures certain favourite speculations adopted from the prevailing systems of philosophy.

Excess to which it was carried.

So much was he influenced by these, and other considerations, that he sometimes spoke of the literal rendering of many parts of Scripture as being not only devoid of the reasonable, but fraught with the pernicious; adding, "that "though in others there were, indeed, certain "notions conveyed under the outward terms, "according to their literal force and import, yet "it was not in these that the true meaning of "the sacred writers was to be sought, but in a "mysterious and hidden sense, arising from the "nature of the things themselves. This hidden "sense he endeavours to investigate throughout "his commentaries, neglecting and despising, for "the most part, the outward letter; and in this

"legibus subdidere, quamvis ille nec de Deo, nec de Angelis "similia scripserit, immo multo leviora dixerit de hominibus? "Nemo enim in illius libris est, qui tale quid ausus sit, quale "Saturnus contra cœlum, aut Jupiter contra patrem. Non "est apud illum pater hominumque Deûmque, qui cum propria "filia concubuerit."—Opera, I. 336.

LECT. VI. "devious path he displays the most ingenious "flights of fancy, though always at the expense "of truth, whose divine simplicity is scarcely "discernible through the cobweb veil of alle- "gory. Nor did the inventions of Origen end "here. He divided this hidden sense, which he "pursued with so much eagerness, into moral, "and mystical—or spiritual. The moral sense "of Scripture displays those doctrines that relate "to the inward state of the soul, and the con- "duct of life. The mystical, or spiritual sense "represents the nature, the laws, and the history "of the spiritual or mystical world. We are not "yet at the end of this labyrinth, for he sub- "divided the mystical world of his own creation "into two distinct regions, the one of which he "called the superior, *i. e.* heaven, and the other "the inferior, by which he meant the church. "This led to another division of the mystical "sense, into an earthly, or allegorical sense, "adapted to the inferior world, and a celestial "or anagogetical sense, adapted to the superior "region."*

In the work of Origin against Celsus these unhappy eccentricities are of less frequent occurrence than in his commentaries, but even there such examples are not wanting. Thus in the tables of stone, written upon as with the finger of God, Origen could see the engraving of the divine law on the tablet of natural conscience.

* Mosheim, Hist. I. 277, 278.

In the breaking of those tablets, the occasion of which was the worship of the golden calf, he saw the erasure of the law from the conscience by the entrance of sin. And in the re-writing of the law, men were to learn that the effects of their apostasy were to be removed by the intervention of the gospel.* LECT VI.

Subsequently, it is laid down as a general principle, that all the leading circumstances or events noticed in Scripture have in them a concealed meaning, which the enlightened reader, with due effort, may discover. And having spoken of the metaphorical use made in the New Testament of the crucifixion and death of Christ, as the figures of the christian life, it is added, "but his burial, "his tomb, and the person who buried him, all "are points of much importance, on which I "mean to prepare a distinct treatise. At present "I shall only mention the linen cloths in which "it was wisely ordained by Providence that the "spotless Jesus should be enveloped; and also "the new sepulchre, hewn out of the rock, "wherein, as John records, never man lay. It "may be well to inquire whether the account of "the sepulchre, as given by three Evangelists, "does not present some convincing evidence in "regard to divine truth, and whether such as "apply themselves to the obscure and hidden "sense of Scripture should not search for some "concealed doctrine in the fact that Jesus was

* Opera, I. 323.

LECT. VI. " laid in a *new* sepulchre, a sepulchre, as two of " the Evangelists affirm, in which no man had " lain. For it behoved that one whose end " appeared so fatal and extraordinary, that he " gave forth signs of life after death, by the " effusion of water and blood from his wounded " side, should partake of an unusual burial. " Inasmuch as his birth was not in the ordinary " course of nature, but by a virgin mother, it " was on this account fitting that his interment " should be accompanied by circumstances be- " speaking an untainted purity, which circum- " stances we see in his being laid in a new " sepulchre, and in one not composed of many " stones placed together by art, but hewn in an " entire rock. But concerning the literal nar- " rative in these places, and that higher signifi- " cation that should be attached to the things " thus said to have happened, and of which they " are the figures, it would be easy for those who " have applied themselves to such studies to dis- " course more sublimely and divinely." What Origen *could* find in such a subject is sufficiently indicated in what he has here said upon it, and may be conjectured but too readily from other parts of his writings.*

Scripture history is represented by the same writer as always containing both a moral and a mystical sense. Thus the coming of the Syro-Phœnician woman to the Redeemer, imploring

* Opera, I. 438, 439.

the recovery of her daughter, is explained by saying, that every one who is subject to sin dwells, like that woman, on the borders of Tyre and Sidon; and that to turn from a vicious to a virtuous life, is to migrate, as she did, from the country of Tyre and Sidon into regions nearer to God. The fact also that the Saviour met the woman when coming on this errand, is described as showing his willingness to meet every returning sinner.* Again: Moses relates that after the death of Joseph, the children of Israel were much increased, and this circumstance is regarded as teaching, that the mortification and death of sin in the believer, shall be followed by a large increase of his moral and spiritual graces!† LECT. VI.

Nor was it enough that the facts of scripture history should be thus made to speak whatever the imagination or the humour of the commentator might deem expedient; a large portion of those facts, both in the Old Testament and the New, were described as mere inventions. Some were so regarded on the pretence that they were descriptive of what could not by possibility have happened; others as consisting of pure fiction; the design of the Holy Spirit in both being to convey a hidden meaning, and by this means to imbue the minds of men with a peculiar knowledge of the mysteries of their redemption. As the narrative portions of Scripture were con-

* Opera, III. 503. † Opera, II. 131.

LECT. VI. ceived to be worthy of God or otherwise, to be of a useful or injurious tendency, so were they to relate to the possible or the impossible—to be classed, if I may so speak, with the real or the unreal. Indeed, to such an extent did Origen adopt the Platonic doctrine of *ideas*, which so strongly pervades all the preceding speculations, that he viewed all the objects and occurrences of the material world noticed in the Scripture, as the archetype of an invisible order of things; the natural world being only a more perceptible exhibition of a spiritual one, to which it owes its existence.*

The celebrity of Origen would almost neces-

* See the preface to the Benedictine edition of Origen's works, and Mosheim's De Rebus ante Constant. Seculum Tertium, sect. 28. In one of the most vicious of these excesses, even in a denial of the literal or real truth of much in the narrative portions of Scripture, Origen had his precursor in Philo, who allowed himself to be hurried thus far from the right way in opposing such as attached too literal a meaning to some of the metaphorical representations of the inspired writers. Thus the history of Paradise became a fable with one party, as the consequence of its being pushed to the extremes of literalism by another. "Philo suggests "the inquiry: How can Moses attribute to God, who is far "above all parties and changes, anger, zeal, and other similar "human things? and he answers: Moses has here, like a "wise lawgiver, let himself down so as to meet the wants of "rude sense—led men, incapable of the contemplation of "pure truth, who must at first be restrained from evil by the "fear of punishment. Let all such persons, therefore," says he, "learn those *false* things, by which they may be pro-"fited, if they are unable to be amended by truth; for the "most approved physicians dare not tell the truth to those

sarily produce a multitude of imitators with respect to his manner of teaching; and it was inevitable, that many of these, not possessing the discrimination of their master, small as that may sometimes appear to have been, would fall into even greater extravagance. The student possessing any considerable acquaintance with the works of Origen, and with those of the subsequent Greek and Latin Fathers, must have been often surprised at the extent in which the voluminous productions of the latter are found to be transcripts from the former. Not that Origen's manner was always approved. The attachment of his disciples to his principles was most ardent, but so formidable was the opposition made to them by the envy, or the more scriptural piety of his opponents, that during several centuries the church was continually agitated by disputes on the subject of Origenism.

His comments on the Scriptures much incorporated in the works of subsequent Fathers.

While men, who were regarded as in the main orthodox, passed into extremes of this description in the interpretation of Scripture, it will be

Heretical sects adopt his theory with still greater license.

" who are dangerously ill, because they know that this will " depress them, and the disease will gain strength." (Deum Immutab. pp. 302, 303. Neander, Hist. I. 49.) Such in effect is the frequent language of Origen. (Opera, I. 336.) But, as Neander justly remarks, " Philo here did not re- " member, that the fear of punishment can at most only " restrain the open outbreak of vice; he did not consider " that the Old Testament notion of God's anger contains a " great truth, represented in human language, the truth of the " reality of sin and guilt."—Ibid.

LECT. VI. concluded that the parties who were disowned as heretics must have been at a much greater remove from a due reverence for the sacred writings, and from the guidance of a sound judgment in the exposition of them. And, in fact, by this latter class, the documents included in the canon of Scripture were received, rejected, or mutilated at pleasure, the most spurious productions being frequently substituted in their room. It was their manner to describe the apostles as forbearing to communicate many things which they knew, except under the veil of allegory; and as being ignorant of many things, the discovery of which, in the use of proper means, would be no difficult attainment. On these points the early heretics were generally agreed; and they accordingly applied themselves to finish what the inspired writers were said to have left incomplete, and especially to elucidate a supposed hidden meaning in the gospels and epistles. In these efforts, their methods of explaining the Scriptures were just as licentious as the occasion might require. Many rejected the whole of the Old Testament; and the parts of the New that were retained, were so glossed as to be assimilated with the most unscriptural and irrational speculations.*

* Of the above statements we have ample proof and illustration, as every student of ecclesiastical history must know, in the great work of Irenæus, Adversus Hæreses; and in the "Prescriptions" of Tertullian.

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Peculiar character of this theory.

It is plain that the solicitude of the whole class of expositors to whom we have been referring, was less to discover what the Scriptures really teach, than to ascertain what they may be *made* to teach. When the literal or grammatical meaning is deemed at all admissible, it is admitted less on its own account than on account of other things which are to be engrafted upon it on the pretext of some real or supposed resemblance. The object is not so much to give a rational explanation of human language, as to detect resemblances, and to institute comparisons; and as these resemblances, which will always be most prolific where there is most imagination, are not subject to any law, but to be regarded as proper purely because so commending themselves to the mind of the commentator, it must follow that the texts of Scripture will be liable to as many renderings as there may be persons to invent them, the inclination or the taste of each being the only law of each. With the ignorant and the indolent, such a course of procedure must ever be convenient, as it is one which may be made to supersede all the usual aids of learning and reflection. What is more, the men who trust to the force of their imagination for the evidence of their opinions are invariably dogmatical and intolerant. This may result, in part, from the circumstance, that the ordinary modes of meeting difficulty have been dispensed with, so

LECT. VI. that the modesty which such exercise might have induced is wanting; and, in part, from a misgiving as to the defensibleness of their cause if properly examined. But come whence it may, the fact that the connexion alluded to generally exists will not be long questioned by the observing and reflecting. The ease with which such a system might be made to subserve all possible error must be at once manifest; but in illustration of this particular it may be well to glance at some of the more remarkable among the delusions to which it gave existence, and a kind of protection.

Speculations and errors which it served to introduce.

Some striking examples of this description have already claimed our attention, but there are others which should receive a passing notice. It was while avowing himself a Christian, that Clement of Alexandria maintained the existence of preceding worlds, formed from the substance of the present; that he described the planets as animated bodies; that he proclaimed the eternity of matter; and his belief in the transmigration of souls. His account of the birth of Eve was not only different from what is given in Scripture, but such as not to bear repeating. He spoke of the angels as having been ensnared to impurity by the beauty of women; and, with other strange doctrines, held an unintelligible dogma, which distinguished between a Word that became incarnate, and a superior Word which has remained invisible, and which is alone the

Word of God.* It is proper to add, that Clement lived to modify some of these opinions, and that others were wholly abandoned before his decease; but how must he have explained the oracles of truth to have made them agree in any measure with such notions? LECT. VI.

In the scheme of Origen, there were many speculations of this unauthorized description, even to the end of his days. He sometimes spoke of the Redeemer so as to appear to favour the Arian hypothesis. There are, however, innumerable passages in which his language on this point is strictly orthodox, and these oblige us to conclude that his less accurate expressions were an effect of the great evil of his system and his times, which consisted in an attempt to distinguish and define on matters of religion to a degree much beyond the capabilities of the human mind. It is certain, however, that he viewed the souls of men as passing into their present connexion with the body and the earth from some pre-existing state, the measure of their delinquency in that former state having determined the measure of their debasement in the present. He also speaks of them as existing from eternity. Angels he described as being in some degree corporeal, the bodies of the fallen among them partaking of a nearer approach to visible substance. The death of the Saviour,

* Tillemont, Mémoires, III. 185—196, 650—654. Dupin, I. 62—66.

LECT. VI. which, in some mystic sense, he understood to have taken place in other worlds beside our own, he regards as having imparted a benign influence to the destiny of all rational natures. Its ultimate effect, he affirmed, would be a universal restoration ;—even the fallen angels being raised once more to the possession of their long-lost glory and happiness. The doctrine of original sin he can hardly be said to have embraced in any form, and his whole system was deeply imbued with Pelagianism. He also taught the existence of a state of contrite suffering as awaiting the disembodied spirits even of good men, and which he explained as being that fire through which all such spirits must pass before ascending to the celestial regions. During a season they might be doomed to rove about the earth, but, becoming at length pure, they will rise to a state of intimate union with the Divine Nature, and thus attain the highest state of felicity. But no creature can be so elevated as to be secure from falling, even to the lowest hell; and, in the great and ceaseless revolution of all spiritual and all material things, the most fallen may some day ascend to the place of the most ennobled.* Again then we ask, what violence must not have been done to the language of the word of God, before men professing to receive it as such could have been found, not only

* Opera, Præfatio. Dupin, I. 107—116. Tillemont, Mémoires, III. 551—595.

retaining, but zealous in the avowal of opinions like these? For it must be remembered, that the great objection to most of these fancies is not simply that they are unauthorized by revelation, but that they directly contravene it, and in some of its most important provisions. LECT. VI.

We have dwelt the longer on this branch of our inquiry, not only from its great general importance, but from the fact that the corruptions of Christianity which did not originate in the false theories we have noticed were all greatly strengthened by them. The Fathers have not been without imitators in their various methods of scriptural interpretation, even in our own time; and their theories, pushed to the same foolish extent, have been generally adopted for the sake of errors hardly less extravagant. It is our happiness to live at a time when the vicious methods of expounding holy writ to which reference has been made, have less tolerance than in any preceding age of the church. But in this department, we have much to unlearn, and much to acquire. Never were the means of biblical criticism so ample, and never were they upon the whole so well applied. Instances, however, still occur, in which ignorance usurps the place of knowledge, allowing the imagination and the passions to encroach on the province of reason; and others, in which reason itself, proud in its assumed sufficiency, and wedded to a wretched literalism, is found at issue

LECT. VI. with the spirit and power of the book it essays to interpret. There is an enthusiasm founded on natural capability and self-culture, which leads astray as variously and as fatally as that which results from pretensions to personal or divine illumination. It is by availing himself diligently and devoutly of the natural, and the supernatural, that the wise man arrives at a knowledge of the truth. Men are enjoined to seek for such knowledge as for hid treasure, and are at the same time assured that if they find the object of their search, it is because the gracious Being who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shone into their heart.*

Other instances, in which the spirit of the Gentile philosophy proved injurious to the interests of Christianity, will now require our attention. But on these our observations must be more limited.

Effect of the spirit of the ancient philosophy on the controversies relating to Christian theology.

II. One very early effect of philosophy on Christianity was to connect it, in an injurious degree, with A POLEMICAL SPIRIT. In the present state of human nature, opinions are rarely propagated or maintained without the aid of controversy; and it should be expected that the circumstances which give rise to this necessity in other matters, will not only have their influence, but an influence peculiarly powerful on the subject of religion. From the

* John v. 39. 2 Cor. iv. 6.

repugnance of certain leading doctrines of revelation, and, in fact, of its very spirit, to not a few of the preconceptions and tendencies now common with mankind, the Christian will often find it incumbent upon him to *contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints;* and christian ministers will need still to regard themselves as *set for the defence of the gospel.*

Disputations temper of the ancient philosophy.

But while to contend for the truth is an imperative duty, the love of controversy for its own sake is a vicious propensity, condemned alike by the letter and genius of the gospel. It is not possible, however, that we should have attended to the history of the ancient philosophical sects without perceiving that the instances are rare indeed in which we can regard the love of truth as being at all so powerful as the love of that kind of distinction which was obtained by skilful disputation. The philosophical, in every community, were a class separate from the multitude, and far above them, each man being fully aware that his proficiency as a disputant would be to him as a sort of intellectual knighthood, a kind of patent of nobility. When Christianity began to spread through the empire, it was regarded by such men in the light of a new antagonist, whose overthrow was to afford them some new claim to celebrity.

The position in which it placed the first Christains.

Thus the first preachers of the gospel, and the earlier ecclesiastical writers, were compelled to

LECT. VI. appear, almost continually, in the character of combatants. This necessity resulted in part from the nature of their vocation as the opponents of established error, but was much augmented by the circumstance now mentioned. And it must be added, that the natural effect of being so much engaged in controversy, was to imbibe more or less of the undesirable state of mind which the habit of controversy ever tends to produce.

Its injurious influence.

Nor must we hesitate to confess that many of the early defenders of Christianity were by no means proof against the dangers to which they were thus exposed. While directing their strength against one error, they often passed, by a very common process, into others of an opposite description:—in the manner, for example, of the Epicureans, who found no means of escape from superstition except by plunging into atheism. The practice, not yet extinct, of classing opponents differing only in some slight shades from orthodoxy, with the most flagrant heretics, because holding some minor particulars in common with such professors, became but too prevalent. In this manner, christian temper, and christian truth, were too frequently sacrificed. Thus it was not enough to denounce the licentiousness of the world, but an ascetic spirit must be fostered in the church; and in the same ill-regulated spirit, it was not enough that Arianism should be proscribed, its followers must be numbered in the edicts of the first christian

emperor with the disciples of Porphyry, the avowed enemy of every thing christian. LECT. VI.

Another injurious effect from this cause, consisted in that obstinate attachment to particular tenets which is generally produced by the habit of passionate discussion in their behalf. Every battle fought in the logical arena was a new pledge of devotedness to preconceived opinions, however absurd; and every new movement of the passions, which in such encounters were sure to be strongly excited, was as a new force given to their ascendency over the reason.

The want of delicacy, ingenuousness, and even of common integrity, so frequently observable in the controversies of our own day, is sufficiently appalling; but the moderns in this respect are entitled to the praise of moderation and virtue if compared with the ancients. With our conceptions of a philosopher, we associate calmness, and dignified deliberation; and may well be surprised to learn that the discussions of such men were exercises in which they gave vent to the most vulgar slander and abuse, clothed, for the most part, in the language of educated men, but not at all less calumnious on that account, and uttered with a violence hardly distinguishable from that of a Python, except that it lasted much longer. Such, however, was the fact. There was nothing in the refinement of either Athens or Rome to secure them against the frequent exhibition of

LECT. VI. such scenes. The art of reviling, as with the force of a torrent, and without any nice regard to the true or the probable, was one of the most essential requisites in a popular orator. The characters of Piso and Mark Anthony, as given by Cicero, are illustrations of this licensed species of abuse, and may enable any man to judge of its animus when resorted to by speakers who were less restrained by the pride of rank or moral delicacy.

Orators and philosophers, are noticed thus indiscriminately, because our remarks on the temper of ancient oratory apply equally to that of the senate, the forum, and the schools. Lucian paints the disputing philosophers of his day as wiping the perspiration from their brow with a bent finger, while uttering their vociferations, and as separating after having done little more than abuse each other to the utmost;—that man being generally regarded as the victor, who had exceeded in the boldness and loudness of his assertions.

The preceding facts serve to extenuate the frequent asperity of the Fathers.

The causes in which this unseemly custom originated, we need not attempt to ascertain. But its prevalence should prepare us, in some measure, for that occasional asperity in the polemical writings of the Fathers, which, in more recent times, has so often exposed them to censure. There was nothing, indeed, in the prevalence of such manners, to justify men who called themselves Christians in conforming to them; but their conduct in this particular would

have been censured less frequently, and less severely, had it always been viewed, as it ought to have been, in connexion with their times. LECT. VI.

Another circumstance, serving in some measure to account for this fault, and which should be admitted as some extenuation of it, is found in the early education of not a few among the men whose names are most conspicuous in ecclesiastical history. Many of them had been orators, and teachers of rhetoric, by profession, and had been equally familiar with the debates of the schools, and the strife of the bar. Such were Tertullian, Cyprian, Minucius Felix, Lactantius, Arnobius, Victorinus, and Augustine, not to mention others. The passions of Tertullian sometimes led him to indulge in a vehemence of abuse which no circumstances could warrant; but which, if we accept the diatribes of Jerome, is of rare occurrence in any other early christian writer. Others, indeed, there are, who have dealt quite as largely in misrepresentation, but their statements were the effect of credulity more than of any worse cause; and believing what they did of their opponents, their language is not often more condemnatory than the case required. This remark may be applied to Irenæus, and still more to Epiphanius. The last mentioned writer lived in the fourth century, and his great work "Against Heresies" became the depository of all preceding calumnies against such persons.

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Tertullian's account of Marcion, an instance of this asperity.

An almost ludicrous illustration of the remark just made on Tertullian, occurs in the commencement of his work against Marcion. This person was a Gnostic, and a great corrupter of Christianity; but, nevertheless, a man of learning, and the advocate of maxims which procured his followers the reproach, among their countrymen, of being Christians. That the reader might be prejudiced as much as possible against the heresy of Marcion, Tertullian indulges in the most elaborate abuse of the native country of that heresiarch. The *Pontus Euxinus* is described as the most inhospitable of regions, its inhabitants as roaming about in movable cabins, the sexes as indulging in the most promiscuous intercourse, and both as accustomed to wield the battle-axe in war, and to feast on human flesh. The very elements are made to partake of a strange and ominous character. There are no winds except from the north, no seasons that do not belong to winter. The rivers consist of ice, the mountains of snow, and the heavens are blackness. The cold and the lifeless are every where, nothing being warm, nothing living except what is atrocious. But the greatest reproach of Pontus is, that it should have given birth to Marcion— " more ferocious than a Scythian, more unsettled " than the homeless savage, more inhuman than " the Massagetæ, more daring than the Amazon, " more gloomy than the clouds, more cold than " winter, more brittle than ice, more deceptive

" than the Danube, more fitted to inflict sudden " destruction than Caucasus."* LECT. VI.

It hardly need be said that the state of mind which this language indicates, is far removed from the spirit of Christianity. Such outbreaks of passion always bespeak a kind of intoxication; and it were as reasonable to expect that a thoroughly inebriated man should be competent to the more difficult transactions of life, as that minds liable to such hurricanes of wrath should escape those snares in matters of opinion with which all mortals are beset. Nor should it be forgotten, that the men who, from this ascendency of the passions, are peculiarly exposed to error, are just the men who are impelled to *act*, and with their characteristic energy, as the propagators of the tenets it may have been their humour to adopt. It is the temptation, moreover, of such minds, to judge of their own religious pretensions, by the degree of their displeasure on account of the real or supposed irreligion of others :—an easy, and a common, but a most fallacious course of arriving at a state of fond assurance on the subject of personal religion. Its pernicious effects.

Another vice which marked the controversies of the period now under review, consisted in the practice of imputing to opponents, as matters of formal opinion, every consequence presumed to be deducible from their avowed doctrine. This artifice, indeed, has never ceased to be attendant Consequences, real or supposed, imputed as the formal doctrine of opponents.—Extent of the injury resulting from this practice.

* Opera, 365, 366.

LECT. VI. on human discussion, but it deserves special notice in this place on account of its marked influence on the subsequent state of Christianity. It has contributed more than all other causes to make the real doctrine of the ancient heretics a matter of uncertainty; and it served particularly to introduce those metaphysical attempts to define, explain, and guard religious dogmas, whence creeds have their origin, and whence the schoolmen of a later age derived the weapons of their warfare. With the schoolmen, indeed, it became a leading maxim, that when a statement is manifestly true, all its consequences must be manifestly true; and, on the other hand, that the falsehood of a proposition, must involve the falsehood of whatever inference may be shown to be deducible from it. It was no more than consistent, that this fallacious principle should be at length thus openly acknowledged, since it had always been acted upon. "But the "great mischief of adopting this rule in theology," says a learned writer, "appears in the fact, that "no purely scriptural truth can be maintained "consistently with its admission. The theolo- "gian who is influenced by it, will be ever "solicitous against exposing his doctrine to the "censure of the captious objector. What a "temptation then is here, to the minute ad- "justment of doctrines to the cavils of the "theorist! The painful pursuit of the dog- "matist will be to attain that precise form of

" expression, which shall obviate, as far as pos-
" sible, every objection that may be raised from
" the existing state of knowledge in the different
" departments of science. He must be prepared
" to show, that this, or that notion, is implied
" or excluded in his doctrine, as the case may
" require. Nor is this all. He must be further
" able to *demonstrate*, that his collection of doc-
" trines coheres as a system ; that no assertion
" is made on one head that may not be strictly
" reconciled with another, and with *every* other.
" Here again, then, his mind must be kept intent
" on a process very different from that of the
" mere follower of revelation. He must be
" engaged in giving a theoretic perfection to his
" enunciations of the sacred truth, in regulating
" the terms of one proposition, so as to accord
" with the terms of another ; and that the whole
" system may appear compacted of harmonious
" parts. Such a theology is inevitably driven to
" *abstractions* — to the subtle inventions of the
" mind itself—in its statements of scripture truth.
" The simple facts of revelation must by their
" nature be open to objections, and, it may be
" said, to *unanswerable* objections ; because these
" facts belong to an order of things, of which
" we do not directly know the general laws.
" The more indeed we approximate to a know-
" ledge of these general laws, the more will such
" objections disappear. But as we never can
" arrive, in this state of being, at a proper

LECT. VI. " knowledge of them, numerous anomalies, the " evidences in truth of our real ignorance of the " subject, must always exist. For what is the " explanation of an objection, but a demonstra- " tion, that an apparent anomaly resolves itself " into some general fact *better* known? It is " only where the mind has exactly framed to " itself the ideas comprised in any given doctrine, " or expression of doctrine, that it can demon- " strate the inconsequence of all objections " whatever. Objections may be equally futile " against the bare revealed facts, but they cannot " be decisively *proved* to be so, since the facts " are not founded on any precise estimate of " ideas involved in them; and in regard to " these, therefore, objections may be suffered to " stand, without any detraction from our theo- " logy. The case, on the other hand, of a meta- " physical theology, imperatively demands their " solution. Is it then for a moment to be sup- " posed, that the simplicity of the faith can be " held where such a principle of theology is " recognized? Is it not evident rather that the " faith as it is in Christ must be corrupted? " The conclusion of human reason will naturally " be intruded on the sacred truth. The fact will " be accommodated to the theory; and exactness " of theological definition will usurp the place " of the plain dictates of the Holy Spirit."*

* Hampden's Bampton Lectures, p. 365—367.

Nor is it possible to say where the progressive creed which these circumstances must produce will end. As knowledge shall increase, and as the forms of error shall change, there will be new matters to include, and new matters to provide against, in every statement purporting to be an exhibition of the christian doctrine. Thus, as Augustine remarks, the doctrine of the Trinity, owed its ultimate, or scholastic form, to the controversy with Arius; the doctrine of Repentance, its more perfect development to the disputes with the Novatians. The doctrine of Baptism became better understood from the contention with rebaptizers; and the cardinal article of Church Unity, assumed its proper form when the fact of successions began to disturb the conscience of the weak.*

From all these causes it followed, as intimated in the language of Augustine himself, that certain scholastic decisions in regard to the laws and truths of Christianity, put forth by synods and councils, became the one authority, in place of the Scriptures, with the great christian community. To decide on such questions from the Scriptures themselves, was presumed to be quite beyond the province of the laic multitude; and, accordingly, the elaborated wisdom of churchmen, as exhibited in creeds and canons, became at once the rallying points of their order, and

* Opera, Tom. VIII. in Psalm liv.

LECT. VI. a pretext for withdrawing the Scriptures from the eye of the people,—until the book framed to make wise the simple, and to guide the wayfaring man, became unknown beyond the precincts of colleges and convents. Thus controversies having reference to the meaning of Scripture, led to an oblivion of Scripture; and the zeal which should have animated men in the cause of truth as revealed in the pages of inspiration, gave place to a most fanatical intolerance in the cause of refinements, and dogmas, which owed their origin to the metaphysical taste, or the arbitrary pleasure of their authors.

It would be both easy and interesting, did our limits admit, to trace out the intimate and extended connexion which subsists between this course of things, as observable in the earlier controversies of the church, and the ultimate form of that scholastic philosophy which has become so memorable a feature in the history of Christianity and of the human mind. But it must suffice to observe, that though Aristotle was to become so great an authority with ecclesiastics, nearly every thing which subserved his approaching dominion made its appearance while his name was held in disesteem rather than veneration. Even those among the Fathers who were always prepared with their vindications of Plato, were generally regardless of Aristotle. But, in process of time, the mystical extravagance into which they were often led by

the idealism of the former, disposed them to favour the more definite method of reasoning commended by the latter. It is admitted that the deficiencies and misconceptions of the scholastic system were many and serious; and its effect, as a means of impeding the progress of truth, subsequent to the revival of letters, was of the most formidable description. But its impression on Christianity was, upon the whole, much less injurious than had been made upon it by Asiatic and Grecian speculatists; and, aided as it was by the less visionary temperament of the Latin Fathers, it may be said to have saved the orthodoxy of the christian profession during the long interval of the middle age. LECT. VI.

In our own day, the spirit of religious controversy has been so attempered by circumstances, as to be much less repugnant to the genius of religion itself than in any preceding period. Still much of the curiously refined and disingenuous, and not a little of the unjust and malevolent, is observable in the language of modern controversy;—showing that human nature continues the same, and that all hope of its further improvement in this respect must have reference to the further influence of that message of mercy which, rightly understood, produces nothing but *good-will toward men*. The peace of the world and the church must be sought, less in sameness of opinion than in a more abounding philanthropy. All who have gone

LECT. VI. out in pursuit of this object by any other course have missed their way. The truth is not to be sacrificed; nor is it to be served by a spirit at variance with its own expansive charity. Much has been attempted to make men of one mind, little has been done to make them one in *heart*.

LECTURE VII.

ON THE CORRUPTION OF CHRISTIANITY FROM THE INFLUENCE OF GENTILE PHILOSOPHY.

LECTURE VII.

COLOSSIANS II. 8.

Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.

Summary of the preceding Lecture.

In the preceding Lecture, an attempt was made to distinguish between some real delinquencies attaching to the earlier Fathers as controversialists, and certain points with respect to which their faults, to say the least, have been greatly exaggerated. And it appeared that much in their manner of defending Christianity, which it has been fashionable to describe as most inexcusable and pernicious, is, in fact, the very conduct which their accusers have been wont to applaud when occurring in other connexions. It was a great object with these venerable authors to obtain the testimony of nature in favour of revelation, their views of nature being such as to embrace the social condition of the human race, no less than the general appearances and laws of the material universe. This object was not only legitimate,

LECT. VII. but creditable alike to their discernment and humanity. That they did not always prosecute this course wisely is admitted, and we have dwelt at some length on the injurious licence which it often disposed them to assume in the interpretation of the sacred writings. In the hope of softening or removing some of the points at issue between the wisdom of the world and the wisdom from above, they adopted those methods of explaining the inspired word which not only deprived it of its proper sovereignty as the guide to truth but often rendered it subservient to error.

It has appeared, also, that the vicious temper generally betrayed in the contentions between philosophers, was too frequently allowed to make its appearance among disputants who had taken upon them the profession of Christianity. We have seen, moreover, that the effect of this temper, and of the form which the controversies of the early ages of the church assumed, was to introduce those scholastic abridgments of Christianity which, under the name of creeds or canons, superseded the Scriptures, conferred an undue authority on the ministers of religion, and contributed to the manifest deterioration of every thing christian. To this last subject we shall now advert more at length, the first point of consideration in the present Lecture being—the influence of the ancient philosophy as facilitating the establishment of FALSE AUTHORITY IN THE CHURCH.

LECT. VII.

Influence of Philosophy on false authority in the Church.

I. The introduction, and the systematic augmentation of such authority, was a result which could not fail to ensue, when such topics as became matter of debate between the early Christians and their opponents were taken up in the spirit and the form which characterised the early ecclesiastical controversies.

The province of human reason in religion imperfectly apprehended by the Fathers.

These discussions had always been conducted with the greatest acrimony, when relating to matters which human reason was least competent to determine. Most of the particulars thus debated had been left in much of their native obscurity by the sacred writers themselves; and the very partial nature of the communications made by them in regard to certain mysterious facts peculiar to revelation, added largely to the number of the topics on which there would be ample room for a difference of judgment.

The vain curiosity, and mistaken confidence, which led so many of the philosophers of antiquity, and more especially their disciples, to affect an intimate knowledge of things concerning which very little could possibly be ascertained, soon became observable in the writings of professed Christians, disposing them to conclude that there could not be much in the modes of being among purely spiritual natures, or even in the manner of existence peculiar to Deity, which a properly disciplined reason might not in some sense comprehend. Hence the primitive Fathers rarely make any reference to the

LECT. VII. divine nature, or to the great facts of our redemption, as the incarnation, the atonement, and the work of the Holy Spirit, as involving any thing really inexplicable. On the contrary, they are generally prepared with modes of illustrating their most abstract conceptions on these points; and these illustrations are generally adduced as though possessing all the clearness, and carrying along with them all the evidence that reason may demand. Thus far even the more ancient ecclesiastical writers anticipated a leading maxim of the scholastic philosophy, which was to propound what should have been deemed the unquestionable facts of revelation, as matters to be proved, in order that the belief of them might be in some degree an act of the reason, induced by the force of argument, and not merely an act of submission to authority.

But in proportion to the mysteriousness really attaching to matters of opinion, is the probability —we may say the certainty—that they will be differently viewed by different minds. And when this material fact is so little considered, as to allow it to become fashionable to dogmatize on such matters, as though capable of the most rigid demonstration, there will be instances in which equal confidence will be found in opposite extremes, the triumphant conclusions of one man, being far from satisfactory in the esteem of another. Thus an unnatural alliance between the positive and the contradictory promised to

be perpetual, and men are never more disposed to exercise an implicit reliance on authority than when it thus presents itself as the only means of escape from endless disputation.

The disposition of men to render an undue submission to authority.

We must observe, also, that the natural indolence of the human mind is ever disposing men to receive opinions upon trust, rather than incur the labour of inquiry. Nor is it to be regretted, while the moral and social condition of mankind shall retain its present inequalities, that there should be a very general tendency to pay a large amount of deference to the opinions of the wise and good. The immortal Bacon has somewhere said, that "one ought to attend to the undemonstrated assertions of the wise, more than to the demonstrations of others." But the indolence of the human mind, and our natural disquietude under suspense and uncertainty, are sufficient to account for the fact, that the degree of submission which is due to divine authority alone should have been so commonly rendered to the erring judgment of mortals. When men deliver their message in the name of the Deity, and their high delegation is duly accredited, it is at once imperative that we submit to their guidance. But there has ever been a proneness in the majority of mankind to extend this subjection much further; and there were many things in the usages common to the schools of ancient philosophy that would strengthen this tendency, and connect it with the most undesirable consequences.

LECT. VII. Through several ages preceding the advent, nearly every man affecting the study of philosophy had his *authority*, or, in more usual speech, his *master*, on whom he placed an implicit reliance; few presuming to avow an opinion as their own, without attempting to secure it from rude opposition, or contempt, by connecting it with some great name. Thus it became proverbial that with the Pythagoreans the *ipse dixit* of their chief was an end of all strife. Apollonius of Tyana is described as announcing his doctrine toward the close of life in the most dogmatic form, and as vindicating his manner by observing, that "when young he sought after "truth; that in his old age it became him to "speak, not as one who was still seeking, but as "one who had found."* But Apollonius had long dogmatized on the authority of others, as was the manner of persons in his vocation, before doing so on the ground of his own claims. In brief, there is abundant reason to conclude, that the sectarianism of the philosophical fraternities of antiquity, had much less connexion with mental independence, and with an earnest seeking after truth, than the sectarianism, or party zeal of modern times.†

* Brucker's Hist. Philos. Tom. II. p. 105.

† Origen shows, with much spirit, that the charge of adopting opinions on trust, which Celsus preferred against the Christians, was quite as applicable to the multitude who professed themselves as belonging to the different schools of philosophy. Opera, I. 328, 329. But in this passage,

But in the church this evil was soon manifest. Among the believers at Corinth, even in the apostolic age, some were for Paul, some for Apollos, others for Cephas, and others for Christ. At a subsequent period, the kind of warfare which had been so long carried on by the different schools of philosophy, was prosecuted in the same spirit, and with the same weapons, by the disciples of Origen and their numerous opponents.* In the lapse of a few generations

which is too long to be extracted, we may see how possible it was that undue authority in religion should be making advances even through the influence of persons who protested against it.

* It must be observed here, that, so early as the beginning of the third century, a distinction was admitted among Christians between the faith of the many, as being chiefly a matter of authority, and that of the few, as being the effect of more adequate inquiry. This distinction was connected with another, which made the creed of these classes materially different from each other, the superior knowledge of the one being regarded, not merely as an effect of the superior intelligence consequent on better culture, but as embracing certain doctrines which the writers of the New Testament had entrusted in an oral form to their immediate disciples. The Stromata of Clemens Alexandrinus is mainly occupied in explaining and commending this perilous theory; and his authority has never ceased to be put in requisition by such as would teach for doctrines the commandments of men. It was the vanity of being thought peculiarly illuminated, which introduced this *disciplina arcani* in the religion and the schools of the Gentile world; and to the same cause we must attribute its admission into the church, together with the evils which followed in its train. Stromat. Lib. I. p. 322, *et seq.* VI. 771, *et seq. et alibi.* Origen, contra Cels. Lib. I. 325, 326. Euseb. Hist. Eccles. Lib. II. c. i. See also, for further intimations as to

LECT. VII. an appeal to the writings of the Fathers became, what an appeal to the great names in philosophy had long been—an established method of determining the truth or falsehood of opinions. Language expressive of admiration and confidence became prevalent in regard to the great ecclesiastical writers, which not only partook of impropriety, but served to gender the grossest superstition and idolatry. A religious writer, the most accomplished of the age, has justly remarked on this point: "Well might a warning "be taken by the church, even now, against the "danger of indulging the spirit of exaggeration "and of fond adulatory regard to the illustrious "dead. It was this very spirit, as much as any "other influence we can name, which effected "the ruin, and hastened the corruption of early "Christianity. Hence, directly, sprang some of "the worst errors which, in a matured state, "strengthened the despotism of Rome, and made "its services idolatrous, and its practices abomi-"nable." In illustration of this general statement the same writer adds, "The praises of Basil, and "of his institutions, are on the lips of most of the "contemporary and succeeding church writers, "as well Latins as Greeks; and most of the "oriental monkish establishments were founded "upon the model of which he was the author. "Isidore (Lib. I. Ep. 61) reproaches one who,

the steps by which ecclesiastical tradition became authoritative, III. 39. IV. 14. V. 6, 11, 16, 17, 20, 23, 24. VI. 13.

" while he professed high regard to the words of
" our DIVINELY INSPIRED FATHER, Basil, practi-
" cally set his authority at nought. Equivalent
" expressions are employed by other writers."*

* Fanaticism, p. 121. Yet it was not immediately that things came to this pass—at least in the Latin church. What can be more emphatic—more protestant, on the authority of Scripture—than the following passage from the pen of Cyprian. " Beatus quoque Apostolas Paulus, à Domino " electus et missus, et prædicator veritatis Evangelicæ con- " stitutus, hæc eadem in Epistola sua ponit, dicens : Dominus " Jesus in qua nocte tradebatur, accepit panem, et gratias " agens fregit, et dixit : Hoc est corpus meum, quod pro vobis " tradetur, hoc facite in meam commemorationem. Simili modo " et calicem postquam cœnatum est accepit, dicens : Hic " calix novum testamentum est in meo sanguine : hoc facite " quotiescunque biberitis in meam commemorationem : quo- " tiescunque enim ederitis panem istum et calicem biberitis, " mortem Domini annunciabitis quoadusque veniat. Quod si " et à Domino præcipitur, et ab Apostolo ejus hoc idem con- " firmatur et traditur, ut quotiescunque biberimus in com- " memorationem Domini, hoc faciamus, quod fecit et Dominus ; " invenimus non observari à nobis quod mandatum est, nisi " eadem quæ Dominus fecit nos quoque faciamus et calicem " Domini pari ratione miscentes a divino magisterio non " recedamus. Ab Evangelicis autem præceptis omnino rece- " dendum non esse, et eadem quæ magister docuit et fecit, " discipulos quoque observare et facere debere, constantius et " fortius alio in loco beatus Apostolus docet, dicens : Miror " quod sic tam cito demutamini ab eo qui vos vocavit ad " gratiam, ad aliud Evangelium, quod non est aliud, nisi sunt ' aliqui qui vos turbant, et volunt convertere Evangelium " Christi. Sed licet nos aut Angelus de cœlo aliter annun- " ciet, præterquam quod annunciavimus vobis, anathema sit. " Sicut prædiximus, et nunc iterum dico : Si quis vobis " annunciaverit præterquam quod accepistis, anathema sit. " Cum ergo neque ipse Apostolus, neque Angelus de cœlo " annunciare possit aliter aut docere, præterquam quod semel

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This course of things favours the assumptions of ecclesiastical councils.

Still, some difficulty remained. The Fathers did not all speak the same thing. In the hands of a skilful polemic, their testimony might be made to favour unauthorized conclusions. Where, then, was that further authority to be found which should be deemed competent to determine the aggregate truth and wisdom set forth in the voluminous productions of the Fathers themselves. It was the pressure of this difficulty which especially facilitated the progress of the great system of ecclesiastical diplomacy connected with the proceedings of church councils. During some time, and especially while they were only provincial, these assemblies confined themselves to a moderate kind of arbitration with regard to such differences as arose from the source just mentioned. After a while, an independent authority was exercised; and, at length, infallibility itself was claimed in the most unequivocal terms. It was now no more than consistent that the errors of dissentients should be visited, not only with ecclesiastical censures, but with civil penalties.*

" Christus docuit, et Apostoli ejus annunciaverunt; miror " satis unde hoc usurpatum sit, ut contra Evangelicam et " Apostolicam disciplinam quibusdam in locis aqua offeratur " in Dominico calice, quæ sola Christi sanguinem non possit " exprimere."—Opera, Ep. 63.

* Eusebius, Eccles. Hist. Lib. V. c. 23. V. 33, 37, 43. VII. 7. X. 4, 5. Some time before the close of the third century, the bishops assembled in council at Antioch, after deposing Paul of Samosata, petitioned the Emperor Aurelius to expel him by force from the church of that city; and the

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The authority of the Fathers not superseded by that of church councils.

Thus there are links which connect the first step in an undue subjection to authority, with prostration before the most appalling despotism. Not that the authority of the church was allowed wholly to supersede the authority of the Fathers. On the contrary, the doctrines with which the church connected its sanction were put forth as those which had been always maintained by the great body of believers, and by the most accredited ecclesiastical writers. Hence the Fathers were continually appealed to in support of the various dogmas which had been formally approved by the church. Nor was this all. The matters were not few which the church had left undecided, and in regard to these the appeal of the private disputant continued to be to the judgment of ecclesiastical antiquity as the legitimate arbiter in such cases.*

But the Scholastic Philosophy becomes established through their united influence.

In this manner it ceased to be the office of human reason to search after truth; its obligation being restricted to a mere reception of it, or to a very circumscribed method of vindicating

heresiarch was thus removed. So prepared were these primitive worthies for that merging of the spiritual in the secular, and that substituting of coercion for conviction, which soon followed.—Ibid. VII. 30; and Note by Valerius.

* The heretical sects were distinguished from the orthodox less by the strained interpretation which they imposed on the canonical Scriptures, than by the circumstance of their receiving or rejecting those documents at pleasure. This is the matter of complaint and censure in the Prescriptions of Tertullian, in almost every chapter from the seventeenth to the forty-fourth.—Opera, p. 208—218.

LECT. VII. it, as a matter already defined and established. This spell-bound state of the human faculties owed its origin mainly to the ill-directed genius of Aristotle, or rather, perhaps, to that of his professed disciples. All the facts we have now mentioned were so many steps preliminary to the establishment of the system of philosophy known during the middle ages by the name of that philosopher. Indeed, many of these facts, as we have observed, were important parts of that system, having existence long before the system itself had acquired its ecclesiastical form and designation. During several centuries from the time of the apostles, Aristotle, as we have stated, was either wholly unknown to the defenders of Christianity, or was regarded by them with suspicion. By some he was denounced as the advocate of principles tending to nothing short of atheism in religion, and to the most hazardous conclusions in every department of morals. But the implements of warfare which his genius had fashioned, were laid under successful contribution by heretics; and being forced upon the notice of churchmen through this channel, were at length enlisted in their cause. So great was this revolution when accomplished, that the influence of Plato among the Christians of the east through several centuries subsequent to the age of the apostles, was followed by a much more general and permanent influence of Aristotle among the churches of the west.

LECT. VII.

Difference between the influence of Plato and Aristotle on Christianity.

There was, however, this great difference between their respective ascendencies: the influence of Plato tended to change Christianity from the pure state in which its first preachers had left it; while that of Aristotle tended to fix it in the impure state into which it had been changed. The genius of the former had affected the substance of revealed truth; the genius of the latter merely supplied the means of defining and vindicating the different topics in which that truth was said to consist. As known in ecclesiastical history, the one aspired to explore and reveal all the mysteries of truth; the other was content with setting forth the processes by which truth and error may be generally distinguished when brought in comparison. The first, accordingly, commended himself to the imagination; the last, to the reason; but to the reason in a manner so misconceived, that the question—what saith the Scriptures? was forgotten, and the inquiry which assumed its place was—what saith the church?—the church being the only authorized interpreter of Scripture.

Peculiar character of the Aristotelian Philosophy.

When the Roman empire, weakened by its many corruptions, became the prey of its barbarian assailants, the clergy were the only power exercising any extensive control over the moral and social chaos which the face of Europe presented. On that class of persons it mainly devolved to check the force of civil tyranny; and feeble were the indications of mental

LECT. VII. independence during a series of ages in the history of our race, except by the men of that order. But while the clergy opposed themselves, as an impenetrable phalanx, in the way of every movement directed against their influence by the civil authorities, their object was not the preservation of any thing deserving the name of mental freedom, but rather the enlargement and security of clerical power. Every man in this favoured class had consented to forego all claim to such freedom for himself; and, on principle, could hear nothing of conceding it to others. The great tendency of the ecclesiastical system, lauded alike in councils and the schools, was to make the priest the unreasoning tool of a corrupted Christianity, and to vest him with the power of imposing the same base servitude on his flock. It may be true, that the vast circle of questions embraced in the discussions of the schoolmen furnished an almost unlimited field for the play of the human faculties. It may be true, that the authority attached in those discussions to the decrees of councils, and sentences from the Fathers, afforded no mean stimulus to the lover of learning. It may be true, that the manner in which the authorities thus laboriously collected were employed; and, above all, that the practice of obviating every conceivable objection to the conclusions of orthodoxy, before proceeding to the direct means of establishing them, supplied no small space for the display

of whatever is dexterous or versatile in human genius; but it is still true, as facts demonstrate, that the mightiest schoolman was generally a being doomed to move round and round in the same dark and degraded circle, and that consistency required he should do his utmost to prevent the human mind from seeking either the extension or the improvement of that circle.

Its evil effects.

The evil effects of that false authority in religion which the ancient philosophy served in this manner to introduce and to perpetuate are not to be fully described in the limits we now have at command. Two of these evils must be obvious at a glance: a ready avenue was thus presented through which any corruption of Christianity might be foisted on the church; and, in the next place, a motive arose from this assumption for retaining all the corruptions so introduced, however burdensome from the accumulations of time, and however unsuited from the changes of society.

Where this claim is set up in regard to Christianity, Christianity itself is virtually superseded. What the sacred text may *seem* to teach is nothing, the affirmations of the infallible interpreter being necessarily every thing. In such circumstances, men owe no obedience to the Scriptures, but all obedience to the priest. A state of things affording greater facilities to the workers of iniquity can hardly be imagined. Hence the Scriptures are withdrawn from general

LECT. VII. inspection. And hence, where the sacred volume cannot be wholly secreted, it too often proves to be of small import that many things sanctioned by the church are not found there, the church being regarded as having the power to make occasional additions to what is there laid down. Thus the tendency of knowledge is neutralized where its existence cannot be prevented.

In addition to which, the claim to exemption from error, to use the language of Archbishop Whately, "*shuts the door against reform.* The "smallest change in any article of *faith*, would "break the talisman of infallibility, and the "magic edifice of papal dominion would "crumble into ruins. In matters of discipline, "indeed, the Romish church might introduce "reforms, without compromising her claim; "since *there* the question is one not of truth, "but of expediency, which may vary in each "different age and country. But her regula- "tions respecting discipline have been so in- "tertwined with doctrinal points, that she has "generally dreaded to alter any thing, lest her "infallibility should be called in question. For "instance, it has never been contended that the "adoration of images and relics is *essential* to "Christianity; there would therefore be no in- "consistency on the part of the Romish church "in remedying that abuse: but it has been "thought probable, and not without reason, "that to do so might raise suspicions as to the

" wisdom of originally sanctioning the practice ; LECT. VII.
" as to the soundness of the arguments and de-
" cisions by which it was maintained against
" Protestants ; and as to the truth of the mira-
" culous legends connected with it ; and the
" upholders of the Romish system have accord-
" ingly always dreaded (as was remarkably ex-
" emplified not long since in respect to some
" efforts toward such an amelioration, made in
" Germany) to touch a single stone of their
" infirm fabric, lest another, and another, should
" be displaced. For those who are conscious,
" or who at all suspect, (whether with or with-
" out good reason) that great part of the system
" they are maintaining is thoroughly unsound,
" are naturally led to regard the beginning of
" reformation (even as Solomon says of the
" beginning of strife) as ' like the letting out
" of water,' when once commenced, they know
" not to what it may proceed, or how it can
" be stopped. And thus it is that the claim to
" infallibility burdens the Church of Rome with
" a load of long accumulated errors and abuses,
" to which many probably of her adherents are
" by no means blind, but of which they know
" not how to relieve her."*

Nor is the race of men extinct, who, while renouncing the claim of infallibility, as to the letter, act upon it as to its spirit ; and in whose conduct accordingly the kind of evils to

* Errors of Romanism, 194—196.

LECT. VII. which the preceding extract refers, are of manifest and constant occurrence. The power of the state in matters of religion, as recognized in this country at the Reformation, was employed to remove a certain class of corruptions, but it has served to connect a new authority with such as were retained, and it introduced others before unknown. From the first existence of our ecclesiastical establishment as protestant to the present hour, every mind, in proportion to its sanity, has felt the truth contained in the grave satire of Lord Bacon, when inquiring how it should have happened that the state should be so continuously needing modification and change, —the church never ?* There is very little in the facts, or the reasoning, of the passage just cited which does not apply to all ecclesiastical establishments, whether popish or protestant; and the evils resulting from this cause, in the two cases, are all found to be different in degree only, not in kind. The tendency and object of such institutions has been to give law to opinion; and when other methods have failed, this object has been too generally sought by means which have derived the whole of their sanctity from the end they were meant to subserve. In brief, the assumption that we do well to dictate, is not far from the assumption that we should do well to force obedience to our decisions; and the habit of deferring to the authority of others on reason-

* Works, VI, 61—97.

able grounds, is often at a slight remove only from that unreasonable sort of confidence which ministers to the worst species of despotism,—an evil plant, which, as we have seen, was of large growth in the ancient world, but which admitted into the soil of the church became a great tree, overshadowing many nations, and destroying every green thing. LECT. VII.

Influence of philosophy on the sacraments of the church.

II. From the influence of philosophy in relation to false authority in the church, we proceed to notice its effects in regard to the opinions and usages which became connected with BAPTISM, the EUCHARIST, and some other services honoured as christian SACRAMENTS.

The science of Magic,—how viewed by the Fathers.

Among the many particulars which occasion surprise when directing our first attention to the writings of the early Fathers, is the manner in which they frequently express themselves in regard to the received notions on the subject of Magic. That there was much reality in that vain science appears to have been their general conclusion. The magic which was supposed to be connected with the agency of *evil* spirits was, as a matter of course, rigorously proscribed by all ecclesiastical writers.* But the doctrine very commonly maintained on this subject was, that as it is unquestionable, that there are certain names, forms of expression, and practices, which possess a singular potency in relation to evil

* Origen, contra Cels. Lib. I. pp. 325, 344, 355, 356, 374, 383, *et alibi*. Tertul. Opera, Apol. c. xxxv.

LECT. VII. powers; so, on the general principle that there is no evil in the world without its opposite good, we are to believe that there are utterances, and forms, which will be availing as opposed to such powers, and as the means of procuring positive benefit from better natures, and especially from that Nature which is the source of all purity and beneficence.*

The kind of magic which was said to consist in an intercourse with malignant agencies, was generally imputed to the pagan priests, by the first Christians; and not only the frauds of oracles, but the prevalent errors and vices of the heathen world, were regarded as proceeding mainly from the machinations of demons. It is in this view of it that magic is denounced by Origen as an infernal art. But the same writer speaks of Christians, and in immediate connexion with this language, as casting out devils by merely repeating the name Jesus, or by appealing to some of the miracles wrought in that name, and even ascribes a mystic efficacy to the

* Origen, contra Cels. Lib. I. 340—344, II. 425. The former of these passages touches upon the questions subsequently so much in debate between the Nominalists and Realists. We learn from Tertullian that the practice of Christians in his day of frequently signing themselves with the cross, was generally noticed by the heathen, and regarded as a magical ceremony.—Opera, Ad Uxorem, Lib. II. c. v. See also his account of the practice of exorcism, De Animâ, c. lvii. De Coronâ, c. xi. De Idolatriâ, c. xi. Apol. c. xxiii. xxxvii. xli. De Spectaculis, c. xxviii.

bare names, or incantations so employed.* The fact of such efficacy he conceives to have been more particularly evinced when the persons opposing themselves by such means to the powers of darkness have been influenced by christian motives. But he does not hesitate to say, that similar results had frequently followed from these means, as resorted to by men who were not Christians,—a sentiment which he founds in part on experience, and in part on the passage in Matthew, *Have we not in thy name cast out devils, and in thy name done many wonderful works? to whom he will say, Depart from me, I never knew you, ye that work iniquity.* It is denied, indeed, that the name of Christ, when so used, is invoked in the manner of a "spell," or charm; but it is exceedingly difficult to understand his language if some such meaning is not to be attached to it.† Its explanation should be sought in the general doctrine of Origen and others, that assumed the existence of some inherent powers in matter, which being directed by the Divine will, were sufficient to counteract all its alleged evil tendencies; and such a direction of these powers was presumed to have been not unreasonably connected with

* Justin Martyr affirms, that demons never fail to submit themselves when assailed by the name of Jesus, but often prove invulnerable when other names are used, though they should be the names of kings, righteous men, prophets, or patriarchs.—Dial. p. 320. ed. Thirlby. 350, 361. ed. Paris.

† Opera, I. 324, 325. Tertul. Apolog. c. xxiii.

LECT. VII. the use of certain terms, or the practice of certain forms. Thus the doctrine of an occult power in nature was retained; but retained as directed by an influence from above, not from beneath.

But it being admitted that the class of persons who were known in the early days of the Roman empire by the name of mathematicians or astrologers, were possessed of secrets which enabled them not only to anticipate the future, but to extort the services of spiritual agencies, there was enough in the state of the human mind at that period to render it inevitable, that pretensions of a similar kind, but referring to good, and not to evil natures, would be put forth by not a few professing Christianity. And often the motives of these pretenders would not be so much the effect of fraud as of credulity, strengthened, perhaps, by a laudable zeal for the honour of their faith.

These views derived from the Alexandrian Platonists.

In the school of the new Platonists, which, as we have seen, made its appearance in Alexandria at the commencement of the christian era, it became a favourite doctrine, that the perceptions both of the mind and the body might be so far refined and spiritualized, by means of abstinence and contemplation, as to enable men to pass the ordinary line between the visible and the invisible, and not only to hold a kind of sensible intercourse with the natures of more spiritual regions, but to approach even to an actual vision of the Infinite!

Ammonius Sacca, the most celebrated master in this school, contented himself with delivering very moderate precepts for the guidance of men in general; but always exhorted those who would have a place with the rational and the wise, to employ themselves in separating the soul as much as possible from the subduing and polluting influence of the body, and from this region of sense to which the body has been the great means of degrading us. With this view he prohibited the use of wine, and all food having any considerable tendency to invigorate the flesh; the body being the prison in which the soul is confined, and kept in a state of separation from its great Parent. LECT. VII.

In opinions and maxims of this nature consisted the science which philosophers described by the name of *Theurgia*. This science owed its origin to the genius of the Orientalists, but obtained its maturity among the priests of Egypt; and in this its ultimate form it embraced the practice of many mystic ceremonies, in addition to the ordinary and more reasonable modes of promoting abstraction from sensible things. Its object was to purify the soul to such a degree, that the faculty within, on which the images of corporeal things were said to be impressed, might become capable, as we have just remarked, of discerning natures belonging to other spheres of existence, and of penetrating the veil between mortals and the Supreme. In

Its connexion with the science of Theurgia.

LECT. VII. the system of these persons man is possessed, not only of reason, derived immediately from the Deity, but of a sensitive faculty peculiar to the human spirit, on which the images of all mundane things are engraven. The emancipation, and the perfecting of the reason, were to be affected mainly by contemplation; and it pertained to the science of theurgia to purify and strengthen the peculiar faculty adverted to, and at the same time to restrain the appetites, and to etherealize the senses of our inferior nature. It must be added also, that having to do so immediately with our physical nature, as the supposed seat of so much evil, this science embraced an attention to certain aids which it was supposed might be derived from other substances in the physical system, as from the natural or occult properties of certain herbs and stones. From these particulars, it will be seen how nearly allied was the science of theurgia with the science of magic.*

This science approved by Origen and others.

It must be acknowledged that Ammonius, though born of christian parents, and always retaining his early profession of Christianity, was a disciple of Plato much more than of St. Paul. His zeal, however, as the advocate of the theory now stated, was far from being without its influence on the church. Origen, as we have stated, went far in the way of adopting it. In

* Mosheim, De Rebus ante Constant. Seculum Secundum, sect. 31.

his work against Celsus, he contends that the mind may be in the most vivid converse with spiritual objects quite independently of the body, even in the present state of existence. This kind of independence as it occurs during sleep, he regards as no more than may attach to any season of great mental abstraction. This he supposes to have been especially the case with the ancient prophets, whose visions he conceives to have been real, and adapted to a certain refined state of the senses, as well as to a peculiar sanctity of the soul. "Those," he observes, "who investigate these matters deeply, "will find that there is a knowledge of them "which the blessed only discover, (as Solomon "says, thou shalt find the knowledge of the "Lord.) And this state of attainment may be "said to include, a sight adapted to the dis- "cerning of objects above the ordinary cor- "poreal sight, as cherubim and seraphim; a "hearing which receives other sounds than those "produced in the air; a taste that can wisely "distinguish the living bread, the life of the "world, which came down from heaven; a "smell which, as Paul says, shall inhale the "good odour of Christ; and, lastly, the touch "of which St. John speaks, when he says, that "with his hands he had touched the word of "life."* This our author describes as a state of "divine" sensation. And this state, be it LECT. VII.

* Opera, I. 363, 364.

LECT. VII. remembered, is precisely that to which the most eminent among the pagan theurgists professed to aspire. It should be further observed, as a circumstance rendering the theory of these persons somewhat less extravagant, that they regarded the nature of demons, whether good or evil, as being in some degree corporeal, a sort of link between our own mode of existence, and that of a purely spiritual being.*

Effect of these theories on the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist.

Now the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper, were outward signs, intended to denote the gracious influence of the gospel on the nature of those to whom they were administered. It was the avowed object of these services to set forth the transition of humanity from the danger and helplessness of its natural condition, to the state of security and renewed life introduced by Christianity. They were ceremonies to be performed in the use of certain words, and in a certain manner, and with which a spiritual, and, in a great degree, a mysterious influence was to be connected, deeply affecting the character and destiny of the worshipper. A renovation of human nature, more elevated than the heathen theurgist had sought by means of his mystic rites,

* We trace these doctrines in the genii of Mohammed,—beings of a grosser substance than angels, but more ethereal than men, and divided into the classes of Peri, Div, and Tauvins; or fairies, giants, and fates. (Koran, c. vi.) The prophet describes his mission as embracing the restoration of such natures, as well as that of the faithful among men.—Ibid. lv. lxxii. lxxv.

was to be obtained through the medium of these divine institutes. It must, then, be obvious, from what appears to have been the state of the human mind at this period in regard to the nature of spiritual influences, that there was much room to fear lest some mystical and superstitious efficacy should be ascribed to the mere forms connected with these institutes, and even to the natural elements employed in them, such as should serve to place them directly in the light of antidotes to the ceremonies supposed to have respect to malignant powers, and which should injure their simple rationality by allowing them to be regarded as partaking, in some respects, of the same nature with those ceremonies. LECT. VII.

What it would have been reasonable to fear in such a case, history exhibits as the result. "If "things so wonderful," says Origen, "are done "by infernal spirits, may we not fairly conclude "that things still more mysterious may be done "by the immediate agency of Omnipotence?"* This reasoning, though applied in the first instance to the miracles by which divine truth had been attested, is extended by this writer to the divine influence generally, and is precisely that which disposed the heretical sects, together with the orthodox believer, to look on the sacraments as provisions of infinite goodness, opposed, not only in their leading design, but in their matter and form, and in their secret import and workings,

* Opera, I. 425.

LECT. VII. to what was commonly believed with regard to the operations of evil, whether connected with matter, or spirit, or with both. It may be true that this assumed secret power of names, and forms, and substances, when employed for the purpose of communicating spiritual benefit, was far from being regarded by Christians as inherent in the things themselves. On the contrary, it was often very carefully described as having its origin solely from the will of God. But so long as this power was viewed as having a real connexion with such things, in any sense, the homage due to the real cause would be transferred, more or less, to the form and matter of the ceremony; the words spoken would be no longer common words, and the waters of baptism, and the elements of the eucharist, would be no longer common things.

Doctrine of Tertullian and Cyprian on these points.

Accordingly we find the doctrine of baptismal regeneration inculcated by nearly all the primitive Fathers: not only by such writers as Clemens Alexandrinus and Origen, but in the less speculative productions of Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and Cyprian. Justin Martyr describes all baptized persons as being "illuminated," and "regenerated," by means of that rite; as having received the remission of all their sins, and as partakers of a second birth, distinguished from their first, as being the result, in part, of their own knowledge and choice. Nor does he use this language in a highly metaphorical sense, but

so far according to its literal meaning as to have left but a few shades of error to be added to his misconceptions on the subject by the men of later times.* Tertullian speaks of the soul as "re- "newed, in its second birth, by water, and "power from on high; the veil of its corrup- "tion being then taken away, so that it beholds "the light in all its brightness." Its first birth was from an impure parentage, its second is from the Holy Spirit; and henceforth even the flesh becomes the servant of the Spirit. Hence, in baptism, the soul is said to be cleansed from all its sins, and made capable of obtaining eternal life; the Spirit of God, as possessed by Adam in paradise, being therein regained. He states, moreover, that the water in this ceremony is sanctified by the Holy Spirit, who never fails to descend upon it as the name of God is invoked by the officiating minister.† LECT. VII.

Cyprian's theology was formed in the school of Tertullian; and on the subject of baptism was in strict agreement with that of his acknowledged master. Both these writers were too

* Ἐπειδὴ τὴν πρώτην γένεσιν ἡμῶν ἀγνοοῦντες κατ' ἀνάγκην γεγενήμεθα ἐξ ὑγρᾶς σπορᾶς κατὰ μίξιν τὴν τῶν γονέων πρὸς ἀλλήλους, καὶ ἐν ἔθεσι φαύλοις καὶ πονηραῖς ἀνατροφαῖς γεγόναμεν ὅπως μὴ ἀνάγκης τέκνα μηδὲ ἀγνοίας μένωμεν, ἀλλὰ προαιρέσεως καὶ ἐπιστήμης κ. τ. ἑ.—Apol. I. pp. 93, 94.

† Opera. De Animâ, c. xli. Adversus Marcion, c. xxviii. De Baptismo, c. iv. v. vi. viii. In these last passages the writer speaks more than once of the efficacy of baptism as resulting from the ministration of an angel, called Angelus Baptismi.

LECT. VII. highly educated not to have been well acquainted with the theories of the different schools of philosophy. But Tertullian describes the whole body of philosophers as men groping in the dark, who, if they have in any instance arrived at truth, have done so by accident, more than by sagacity; as men, in consequence, who should be deemed sorry guides by persons having access to the revelations of heaven.* In the works of Cyprian there is not, as far as my memory serves me, the bare mention of a single name in the annals of philosophy; and, if we except one passing notice of a certain opinion as held by the Stoics, the various productions of this author contain not the slightest reference to any school of philosophy. But both Tertullian and Cyprian were nevertheless influenced, and very considerably, by philosophical opinions. Most of these, however, (which had been adopted from different sources,) are greatly modified in the productions of these writers, according to their peculiar taste or convictions. Hence it happened that while they were not the disciples of any school of philosophy, they are found to have held the substance of many opinions taught in such schools.

Cyprian, for example, had so far imbibed the prevalent theory in regard to the nature and influence of demons, that he viewed every man in his unconverted state as subject to the power of an unclean spirit, which no influence but that

* De Animâ, c. ii.

of the christian exorcist, and of the waters of baptism could expel. Thus it was stated that some who had been baptized in their beds during sickness, were afterwards " seized with unclean spirits." But Cyprian, adverting to the person who seems to have doubted the efficacy of baptism in such cases, says, " Let him be confident, " that though the malice of Satan may retain all " its power until we come to the water, there all " his subtle poison fails. An example of which " we see in Pharaoh, who, by many perfidious " delays, was able to resist and prevail for a time, " until he came to the water, where he was con- " quered and destroyed. But the blessed apostle " Paul declares that sea to have been the sacra- " ment of baptism, saying, *Moreover, brethren, I* " *would not that ye should be ignorant, how that* " *all our fathers were under the cloud, and all* " *passed through the sea, and were all baptized* " *into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.* And " then he adds, that *all these things were figures* " *for us.* Even so daily is it done among us, when " Satan is lashed, wounded, and tortured by our " exorcists, the voice being human, the power " divine. Often does he say that he will allow " the men of God to go ; but in what he says he " fails, and practises the same falsehood and " obstinate frauds which Pharaoh formerly re- " sorted to. But when the person so possessed " is come to the saving water, and to the sanc- " tification of baptism, we ought to know and

LECT. VII. " believe that Satan is there conquered, and that " the man being thus devoted to God, is libe- " rated through the divine regard toward him. " For if scorpions and serpents, who are most " powerful in dry places, may retain their power " when plunged into water, then may wicked " spirits (the scorpions and serpents on whom " we have power to tread) continue in the body " of a man, in whom the Holy Spirit begins to " inhabit by baptism and sanctification."*

* " Quod si aliquis in illo movetur quod quidam de iis qui " ægri baptizantur, spiritibus adhuc immundis tentantur; " sciat diaboli nequitiam pertinacem usque ad aquam Salu- " tarem valere, in baptismo vero omne nequitiæ suæ virus " amittere. Quod exemplum cernimus in rege Pharaone, " qui diu reluctatus, et in sua perfidia demoratus, tamdiu " resistere potuit et prævalere, donec ad aquam veniret: quo " cum venisset, et victus est, et extinctus. Mare autem illud " sacramentum baptismi fuisse, declarat beatus Apostolus " Paulus dicens: Nolo enim vos ignorare, fratres, quia patres " nostri omnes sub nube fuerunt, et omnes per mare transie- " runt, et omnes in Moyse baptizati sunt in nube et in mari. " Et addidet dicens: Hæc autem omnia figuræ nostræ fuerunt. " Quod hodie etiam geritur, ut per exorcistas voce humana et " potestate divina flagelletur, et uratur, et torqueatur diabolus. " Et cum exire se, et homines Dei dimittere sæpe dicat, in eo " tamen quod dixerit fallat, et id quod per Pharaonem prius " gestum est, eodem mendacio obstinationis et fraudis exer- " ceat. Cum tamen ad aquam salutarem, atque ad baptismi " sanctificationem venitur, scire debemus et fidere quia illic " diabolus opprimitur, et homo Deo dicatus divina indulgentia " liberatur. Nam si scorpii et serpentes, qui in sicco preva- " lent, in aquam præcipitati prævalere possunt, aut sua " venema retinere; possunt et spiritus nequam, (qui scorpii " et serpentes appellantur, et tamen per nos data a Domino " potestate calcantur) permanere ultra in hominis corpore, " in quo baptizato et sanctificato incipit Spiritus Sanctus

LECT. VII.

Effect of these errors with regard to baptism.

One effect of views like these in regard to baptism was, that it should be deemed strictly necessary to salvation; and consequent on this conclusion was an admission of the validity of baptism by whomsoever performed, if administered in the name of the Trinity. Another result from the same cause, was the practice of deferring this rite until the near approach of death. As the sign and the thing signified were supposed to go together, it was judged important that the washing away of sin, said to take place in baptism, should not be sought before the season in which the contracting of any further defilement would be in the greatest degree improbable.* Thus baptism was made, in some measure, to occupy the place which, in a later age, was assigned to the sacrament of extreme unction. These misconceptions with regard to this ordinance prevailed among the most orthodox, while the errors of the heretical sects in relation to it were even more extravagant.†

" habitare."—Ep. 69. Origen, Tertullian, Cyprian, and the early Fathers generally, often speak of baptism as valueless in the case of such as afterwards live ungodly lives. But the licentious formalism which they thus sought to counteract, was an evil which their own unauthorized language on this subject had served to produce.

* This is the reason assigned by Augustine for the delay of his baptism.—Opera Confess. Lib. I. c. xi.

† The disciples of Marcion are censured by Epiphanius, as repeating their baptism when they had fallen into any sin; as allowing the rite to be administered in cases of emergency by females; and as accustomed, when any brother had died

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The doctrine and administration of the Eucharist corrupted from the same source.

With regard to the eucharist, when we remember that it refers to the sacrifice of Christ, from which baptism derives existence and all its efficacy, it will not be supposed that the causes which led to so much delusion in regard to the minor institute would be without their influence on the greater. But the corruptions of the eucharist, though ultimately more extraordinary, and perhaps more pernicious than were those of baptism, were not perceivable so early, and proceeded with much less rapidity.* As a connexion was believed to subsist between the application of water to the body, and a certain cleansing of the spiritual nature, it followed that a similar relation would be regarded as subsisting between the consecrated bread and wine and the spiritual benefit of the recipient. The rhetorical language in which this rite is generally set forth by the Fathers, renders it extremely

without baptism, to appoint that some surviving disciple should be baptized in the place of such person, in the hope that thus the omission might not be remembered against him in the morning of the resurrection.—Lardner, VIII. 417, 483.

* To the age of Tertullian the rite was very generally connected with an ordinary meal, called the Agapæ, or love-feast, (Apologeticus, c. xxxix.) and when so administered, was not much liable to corruption in the way of superstition. The ostentation connected with these feasts by the more wealthy believers, tended not to the increase of devotion, and led by degrees to their discontinuance. Tertullian cast almost every kind of reproach on these convivial meetings, when he became a Montanist. (De Jejuniis, c. xvii.) Clemens of Alexandria had shown himself capable of distinguishing between their use and their abuse.—Pedagog. ii. p. 141.

difficult to determine their precise views concerning it. But the doctrine of transubstantiation, as now maintained by the Romanist, is manifestly the fruit of the Aristotelian philosophy, as adopted by the subtle genius of the schoolmen in the middle age. The sufficiency of what the Redeemer performed and endured in our behalf as man, was very properly said to depend on his being both God and man; and in process of time it was insisted that the efficacy of the elements in the eucharist must depend, not only on their being really the body and the blood of Christ, but on their being as really his soul and divinity. It was from his proper humanity that the virtue went forth which healed the woman who touched him;* and on the same ground—namely, that substance has a mysterious connexion with substance, and nature with its kindred nature, it became the prevalent belief, that by the words of consecration there was a fitness imparted to the very elements of bread and wine, which made them in a sense the cause, as well as the actual seat and channel, of the blessings of salvation.† At length it was boldly

* Mark v. 25—34.

† Eusebius relates a story, on the authority of Dionysius, Bishop of Alexandria, from which it appears, that so early as the third century, superstition had scarcely any thing to add to the misconceptions which had already obtained in relation to this sacrament. (Hist. Lib. VI. c. xl.) Its celebration at funerals, and on the anniversaries of the martyrs, was general, and of very early origin; nor can we censure the

LECT. VII. affirmed, that by the services of the priest all the reality of the Redeemer's nature, and all the efficacy of his mediatorial character, became present in the two forms which the rite exhibited to the eye of the observer. The priest, by whose utterances this all-surpassing miracle was wrought, might be both ignorant and depraved; but the efficacy of his services was not in the least dependent on his personal character, his performance of these being viewed less as his own act than as that of the church through his medium.* By this subtle invention, the imagination of the worshipper was raised above the meanness of the immediate instrument, and brought to bow itself before that shadowy incomprehensible power—the church. Thus the assumed sanctity of the whole, was interposed as a veil to conceal the too palpable faultiness of the parts. Individual priests might be impure, but the system was immaculate; the former might die, the latter was eternal!

Other services elevated to the rank of sacraments.

The causes which led to these altered views of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper,

feeling in which the practice originated, though it prepared the way for many evils. Among these evils I scarcely need mention masses for the dead, and creature worship.—Cyprian. Opera, De Mortalitate, 163—166. Tertul. De Coronâ, c. iii. De Exhortat. Castitat. c. xi.

* Cyprian, indeed, protested against the validity of baptism administered by persons deemed heretics (Ep. 67, 69, 70, *et alibi*); nor was he singular in this particular (Euseb. VII. 5, 7, 9. Clemens, Strom. I. 317); but in the age of Augustine the contrary was the orthodox opinion.

were of a kind which would almost necessarily lead to a multiplication of such institutes. The two ordinances just named were thus corrupted, that they might be more conformed to the systematic wisdom of the schools; and that, by being brought down more to the level of the depraved tendencies of the people, they might become more subservient to the power of the priesthood. The clergy were not careless of the new power which these novel abstractions had conferred on them, and the people were pleased with a change which substituted a passive mysticism in the place of an active godliness. The offices of thinking, and of moral effort, were laborious; and the larger the measure of relief that might be obtained from the obligation to such labour by a passive submission to external forms the better.

Now, as these ordinances were designed to indicate the application of the medicine of salvation to the sickness of the soul; or, in other words, an infusion of the virtues of the christian redemption into the nature of lost men, it was important that this application or infusion should be made to connect itself with all the points of human existence, and in a manner the most complete. Thus baptism, in consequence of the false views which became prevalent concerning it, was long thrust from its proper place as the strictly initiatory rite of the christian dispensation, from the want of some such means of

LECT. VII. dependence as were presented at a later period in the spurious sacraments of confirmation, penance, and extreme unction. As these sacraments obtain, the practice of deferring baptism to the hour of death, and the many ardent disputes about re-baptism, disappear from the page of ecclesiastical history, and the rite which was meant to be purely initiatory, is found in its proper place in the order of administration. The institutions of which we thus speak as human inventions, are viewed by the Romanist as of divine appointment: but the traces of these in the church of the third and fourth centuries, amount to nothing more than certain indications of the want which was then felt in relation to them, and the mere embryo of the practices which have since become connected with them.* As these novel ordinances became established, they were regarded, in common with the older and the true sacraments of baptism and the eucharist, as bearing an immediate relation to the personal religion of the professing Christian. Baptism imparted the grace of regeneration. Confirmation augmented the new life thus bestowed, so that the soul grew to its proper stature in Christ. The Eucharist further operated as a perpetual means of vivifying the

* Cyprian speaks of "omnia sacramenta" (Ep. 70); but it must be remembered that the term "sacramentum" was applied to religious services, and doctrines, with little restriction or discrimination in the early times of Christianity.

spiritual energies of the inner man; and while Penance presented itself as a special means of removing those sins which are constantly recurring in human life, Extreme Unction extended its benefits to the believer in his last moments, cleansing the last stains of human frailty, and fitting the disembodied spirit for its great audit! Thus the doctrine of the sacraments was so constructed, that religion could neither begin, nor be sustained, nor end, successfully, without them. They were the Alpha and the Omega; and the priest, as being alone competent to their administration, was to the worshipper in the place of the Almighty, having the destiny of his victim at his pleasure.

The sacrament of Orders, and that of Matrimony, owe their origin in part to a wish that the observances of this kind should be of the mystic number seven, the number of perfection;* but mainly to a philosophical systema-

* It is in the following terms that Cyprian expatiates on this number—so symbolic in its import according to the Pythagorean and the Cabalist. "Quid vero in Maccabeis, "septem fratres et natalium pariter et virtutum sorte con- "similes, septenarium numerum sacramento perfectæ con- "sumationis implentes? sic septem fratres in martyrio "cohærentes, ut primi in dispositione divina septem dies "annorum septem millia continentes, ut septem spiritus et "angeli septem qui assistunt et conversantur ante faciem "Dei, et lucernæ septiformes in tabernaculo martyrii, et in "Apocalypsi septem candelabra aurea, et apud Solomonem "columnæ septem, super quas ædificavit domum sapientia: "ita et istic septem fratrum numerus, ecclesias septem

LECT. VII. tizing spirit, which saw in the one the means of perpetuating the species, in the other an agency for perpetuating regenerated men, or the church. In this manner the relation of the clergy to their people became that of spiritual fathers, all who were baptized by them being made partakers of a spiritual life by their means.*

Our limits will not allow of any adequate reference to the remains of this state of things in the doctrine of the sacraments, and in the popular apprehension concerning them, in our own protestant country. But much, very much of the delusion which was long since connected

" numeri sui quantitate complexus, secundum quod in primo " regnorum libro legimus, sterilem septem peperisse. Et apud " Esaiam: Septem mulieres unum hominem apprehendunt, " cujus invocari super se nomen exposcunt. Et Apostolus " Paulus qui hujus legitimi numeri et certi meminit, ad sep- " tem ecclesias scribit. Et in Apocalypsi Dominus mandata " sua divina, et præcepta cœlestia ad septem ecclesias, et " earundum angelos dirigit, qui nunc istic in fratribus nume- " rus invenitur, ut consummatio legitima compleatur." De Exhortat. Martyrii, pp. 178, 179. Hence with the seven sacraments we have to remember the seven virtues, the seven deadly sins, and other matters so treated.

* Hampden's Scholastic Philosophy considered, pp. 313, 314. No reader familiar with the works of Cyprian will wonder that the forms of perpetuating the christian ministry should have been ere long raised to the place of a sacrament. The same may be said of the notions which prevailed with regard to penance; while the importance attached to an imposition of the hands of the bishops on the persons of the baptized; and the manner in which the aids of religion were extended to the sick and the dying, are of a nature to prepare the student of ecclesiastical history for the more systematic corruptions which afterwards made their appearance.

with the system now described is observable among us, the errors of the past having been only very partially discarded even by the most accredited teachers of Christianity. Myriads still believe that baptism regenerates, that confirmation gives an increase and fixedness to the work of baptism; and if extreme unction be no longer resorted to, the eucharist is so erroneously presented as to supply its place, and to operate in a manner equally pernicious. LECT. VII.

III. From the influence of the ancient systems of philosophy on the sacraments of Christianity, we must now proceed to glance at their more direct effect upon its DOCTRINES. We speak of their *more direct* effect in this particular, because many things advanced in this and the two preceding Lectures have a strong indirect bearing upon it. Were it not so, it would be necessary to reserve this important topic for more extended observation than can now be introduced. Effect of philosophy on the doctrines of Christianity.

There is hardly another subject on which so great a degree of misapprehension prevails, as with respect to the comparative state of opinion in the church in regard to the doctrines of the gospel during the interval which preceded the accession of Constantine and in the ages subsequent. The former period is not unfrequently adverted to as the age of christian light and purity. The persons by whom these appeals are made, and they are not a small body, do not seem to have suspected for a moment, that On the corruptions of christian doctrine in the age before Constantine.

LECT. VII. the corruption of christian doctrine by princely bishops, perilous as those corruptions are admitted to have been, are almost trivial in comparison with those to which every tenet of the christian faith was more or less subject when bishops, if they had any existence, were distinguished by the enmity of princes, more than by their favour. In the vast space between the age of Constantine and our own, there is scarcely a corruption of *the truth as it is in Jesus* presenting itself, which might not be shown to have made its appearance, and with considerable effect, in the first three centuries. If this be a fact, it can never be to our credit that we should be unacquainted with it, or that we should *seem* to be unacquainted with it. Nor is there any evil consequence to be anticipated from the fullest admission of it, if it be only rightly viewed. On the contrary, the more various and prevalent these corruptions were, the more manifest is it that there must be something wonderfully vital and energetic in Christianity, since it could not only sustain itself, but make such memorable progress, even in such circumstances. If even then, it not only secured its ground, but went on *from conquering to conquer*, what may not be expected from it when partaking of all the advantages which attach to its position in our own age? It is true that this fact carries with it an obvious proof, that great as may be the harm which ecclesiastical establishments have

done to the christian doctrine, there are still other causes which may operate in relation to that doctrine even more injuriously. But if this conclusion be borne out by fact, can it be ingenuous, can it be wise, that we should hesitate to receive it? Ignorance on this point, whether the effect of a fond wilfulness, or of some other cause, must leave us in ignorance as to the value of those practical provisions by which the evil of such a state of things should be opposed, and if possible prevented. LECT. VII.

On the question relating to the extent in which the doctrines of Christianity were corrupted before the commencement of the fourth century, it should be almost enough that a reference be made to the excesses which we have seen as characterising some of the early heresies, and to the dangerous and unscriptural speculations which we have already noticed as frequently occurring in such writers as Justin Martyr and Tertullian, and as teeming in almost every page of Clemens Alexandrinus and Origen. A considerable exercise of candour is no doubt incumbent upon us when judging of the heresies of those times, on the ground that nearly all we know of them is from the report of enemies; but when every fair allowance is made on that account, it will still appear, not only that they were extensively embraced by persons calling themselves Christians, but that they were of a nature including a denial or corruption of every

LECT. VII. thing conferring distinctiveness and value on the christian system. And if we pass from the baseless theories of these pretended Christians, to a consideration of the state of theological opinion among the most orthodox, many deep traces of the same corruption continue to be observable.

In the writings of those Fathers who lived during this period, there are sufficient notices to show that they were believers in the doctrine of the Trinity; but notices, nevertheless, which indicate that their perceptions on this subject were often singularly confused and defective. To the admirers of Calvinism, these productions must be in nearly all respects far from pleasing. There are instances in which they seem to betray a total ignorance of the doctrine of original sin, and they never recognize it except under modifications which have no place in the creed of the Genevan Reformer. In fact, the early Fathers are remarkable for a strong Pelagian tendency in their general intimations of opinion on this subject, as well as on the subject of divine grace, and the freedom of the will. On the satisfaction made for sin by the death of Christ, they often seem to speak more fully and correctly. But even this point must have been very much obscured in the apprehension of the people, by reason of the frequent language of their guides with respect to the great merit of celibacy, of penance, and especially of martyrdom, as means of propitiating the Almighty,

and washing away sin. The Platonic doctrine of a separate state, where the spirits of the departed are purified, and on which the later doctrine of purgatory was founded, was approved by all the expositors of Christianity who were of the Alexandrian school, as was the custom of performing religious services at the tombs of the dead. Nor was there much difference between them and Tertullian in these particulars. That these innovations were in many ways exceedingly injurious, and incompatible with just views of the priesthood of Christ, must be at once manifest. And as to the merits of the martyr, these were viewed as partaking of a kind of supererogation, and not a little difficulty sometimes arose from such persons dictating to their pastors or brethren from their prisons on the passing questions of discipline, particularly in relation to such as had fallen from their steadfastness in times of persecution, the holy endurance of the confessor being considered susceptible of application (we may almost say in the way of atonement) for the frailty of the lapsed, and as vesting him with a kind of right to say who among those unhappy persons should be received to the communion of the church, and who should be continued in separation from it.

I shall quote the language of the present Bishop of Lincoln on the theology of Justin Martyr, as supporting some points of this statement.

LECT. VII. "What were Justin's opinions," says the bishop, "respecting the change made by the fall in "man's condition, with reference to his capacity "of choosing good and evil, does not clearly "appear. He speaks of a concupiscence exist- "ing in every man, evil in all its tendencies, and "various in its nature; and on one occasion, "seems to distinguish between original and "actual sin. He says, also, that man being "born the child of necessity and ignorance, "becomes by baptism the child of choice and "knowledge; but the necessity and ignorance "in which man is said to be born, are not "referred to the transgression of Adam.

"From the indistinctness of Justin's language "respecting the effects of the fall on the pos- "terity of Adam, we may expect to find an "equal indistinctness on the subject of grace. "He insists, however, repeatedly, that man "stands in need of illumination from above, in "order to be enabled rightly to understand the "sacred Scriptures; and we find something "resembling converting grace in his Dialogue. "If Justin held the doctrine of predestination "at all," continues the bishop, "it must have "been in the Arminian sense — ex prævisio "meritis."*

What is thus said of Justin Martyr, is in substance what may be said of all the Greek Fathers

* Some Account of the Writings and Opinions of Justin Martyr, c. iii.

until the age of Constantine. And Tertullian, while more scriptural on some points, is always deeply affected, even during the most sober period of his history, with the errors of his times. We may presume, also, that the agreement between him and his disciple Cyprian, would have been sufficiently apparent, had not the works of the African martyr been so much restricted by circumstances to questions of discipline and practical piety.*

State of the christian doctrine subsequent to the age of Constantine.

It was reserved to the improved literature of the church in the fourth and fifth centuries, and to the influence of the Arian and Pelagian controversies, to restore, in a great measure, those views of the Trinity, of the fallen state of man, and of the doctrines of grace, which had been so far obscured and impaired by the dogmas of an antichristian philosophy.† The statements adopted on these points in synods and general councils after the close of the third century, may not have been in all respects such as inspired men would have put forth; but they were in much nearer unison with *the faith once delivered to the saints* than would have been published by any such assembly before that time.

* It was my intention to have supported the views expressed in the above paragraphs, relative to the state of theological opinion in the first three centuries, by an ample reference to authorities; but to cite every apposite passage in the Fathers on the subject would be to make a parade of nearly the whole of their works.

† Augustin, Opera, Tom. VIII. in Psalm 54.

LECT. VII. Many of the old misconceptions were retained; others were incorporated with them; and the whole assumed a character and form which promised perpetuity to whatever of error it contained; but, as a whole, it was no small improvement on the past. Hence we regard Justin Martyr as a sorry guide on questions of theology if compared with Augustine; and we can spare the flights of Origen, when we have the more practised intelligence of Jerome. Even in the days of the apostles, we find that the ordinary expositors of christian truth were in the greatest danger of being turned aside from the simplicity in Christ, by some one or more of the abounding delusions; and it is obvious, that the inspired guides of the church were no sooner removed, than such an admixture of the tenets of philosophy with the doctrines of the gospel ensued, as required the controversies, the learning, and, we may add, the piety of a later age, so far to analyze and correct as to prevent the threatened extinction of the form and substance of the apostolic faith, and of the very name of Christianity.

Piety of the early Fathers.

But while the theological system of the primitive Fathers was so far defective, and even unscriptural, it is evident that their piety was of that firmly rooted description which eminently fitted them for the unsettled times on which they were thrown. Their character was much more apostolic than their creed; and we may well

pity the moral taste of any man who, after reading their productions, and endeavouring to realize their circumstances, is not constrained to render an unusual homage to their bold integrity, and their philanthropic devotion. If they retained the truth but partially, and often with a strong mixture of error, it was retained with their whole heart, and proved enough to stay them in persecution and in death. The benefit I have derived, both as a Christian and a christian minister, from the attention I have been able to bestow on their works, and especially on those of Cyprian, is greater than I owe to any uninspired source; not in consequence of the theological truth which any of those works contain, for that is of small amount, but from the refreshing proofs they afford of the energy which the grace of heaven may infuse where religious knowledge is singularly imperfect, and mixed, more or less, on all points, with erroneous conclusions. LECT. VII.

IV. Our further observations on the branch of the inquiry now before us must be in few words, and will be restricted to the influence of the ancient systems of philosophy on Christian Morality. Influence of the Pagan philosophy on Christian Morality.

The earliest systems of morality are found in the codes of legislators, where its rules are enforced simply with a reference to the general good, and on the assumption of their general obligation. But as civilization advances, these

LECT. VII. codes are enlarged, become more complex, and require to be applied by the most experienced wisdom. Thus the science of legislation is founded on the science of morals, the equity and wisdom of penal enactments being in a great measure determined by a previous estimate of individual actions. It was in Greece, accordingly, where social polity was so much an object of study, that the subject of morals was first viewed as susceptible of exact and systematic treatment. In this science Socrates distinguished himself; and Aristotle brought to it a greater, and even a more practical sagacity. But here, as in other matters, it was the doctrine of Plato which chiefly influenced the opinions of the leading men in the christian church during several centuries.

Connexion between morality and theology.

The system of Plato, in this respect as in others, was derived mainly from that of Pythagoras, in which the Deity himself was regarded as the great standard of moral excellence, and the true end of human existence was said to consist in the nearest possible imitation of its Author. Thus morality was a branch of religion, and could be perfect only as religion should be perfect. It will be seen that the foundation of this theory had less to do with what is known concerning the nature of man, than with what was assumed with respect to the nature of God. But concerning the nature of God the Christian possessed revealed certainty;

and the system which had become so prevalent while resting on conjecture, would naturally become more imposing as founded on well-attested truth. The believer knew who had said, *Be ye perfect, as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.* He could sympathize with the devout Psalmist as exclaiming, *Then shall I be satisfied, when I awake in thy likeness;* and was delighted to find that so great a name as that of Plato might be adduced in support of his favourite impressions in regard to the chief good, and the moral perfection of humanity. This view of moral science, as sustained by scriptural authority and strengthened by the suffrage of the greatest of philosophers, is that which every where presents itself in the Greek Fathers, and in the writers of the Latin church; nor was it materially disturbed when the fame of Plato gave place among ecclesiastics to that of Aristotle. The works of Ambrose, of Augustine, and of Gregory the Great; Boethius's Consolation of Philosophy, together with the lives of a multitude of saints, and the laborious productions of the later schoolmen, all manifestly tended to perpetuate this alliance between morality and theology, or rather this strict dependence of the former on the latter.

Corruption in morals the necessary result of corruption in theology.

Nor were the clergy without important reasons for prosecuting this course. It was necessary to the completeness of their spiritual empire, that their authority should be equally decisive with

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regard to the questions of truth, and those of duty. But as these became alike matters of dictation from a corrupt power, they became alike corrupt. In such a state of things, when religion degenerated into priestcraft, morality became necessarily little else than a wily casuistry.

In these remarks, I am far from meaning to insinuate that the science of morals should have been studied independently of holy writ. I regard the sacred Scriptures as the only competent, and, in many respects, the only certain guide in relation to that science. But the evil in the case now under consideration was, that the guidance of revealed truth, while professedly accepted, was not followed :—a false religion being put in the place of the true, and the excesses of superstition being allowed to entrench on what should certainly have been regarded as the unquestionable grounds of human duty.*

Nature of the errors proceeding from this source.

We have all heard of the distinctions made in school divinity between the comparative merits of a contemplative and an active life ; and be-

* This distinction has not, I conceive, been sufficiently attended to by Mr. Hampden, in his valuable Lectures on the Scholastic Philosophy. (Lect. VI.) It is, no doubt, true that the " connexion between theological and moral truth has been of serious injury to both." But this is no more than might be said of the connexion subsisting between many other things ; while the greater evils prevented by these connexions, and the amount of good attendant on them, may be such as abundantly to justify their continuance. If it be at all the object of revelation to supply a rule of duty, that rule, as far as it extends, should be paramount.

tween what were called mortal and venial sins. LECT. VII.
It is well known, also, that in the same quarter, high moral attainment was regarded as consisting in a mortifying of the flesh, more than in any wise discipline of the heart; and that, on the same principle, the ardour of a man's piety was commonly determined by the number of his genuflexions and his prayers. Each of these errors had its portion of truth, and each had originated in some general tendency of human nature; but the root and power of them all must be ascribed to certain maxims of the ancient philosophy which had become incorporated with Christianity.

Thus the heroic virtue so frequently spoken of by the ancients, supplied the pattern of that spiritual ambition which seized so powerfully on many an ecclesiastical aspirant. In the former, as in the latter, the direct path to the object of pursuit was in a separation from the calls of the flesh and of ordinary affairs; in a triumph of the mental over the physical, of the future and the ideal over the present and the known. We have noticed it as the doctrine of Plato, that the soul should be assimilated to the Author of its being, so as to be in some sense identified with him: the same was the doctrine of Aristotle, and was unhesitatingly adopted by the church. It followed, however, from the excess to which this principle was carried, that the love of man became severed, to a perilous extent, from

LECT. VII. the love of God; and that certain false anticipations of the future were indulged so as to preclude all suitable gratitude and regard for the present; the abstract and the speculative taking an ill-regulated precedence of the tangible and the ascertained. The most elevated life in all respects was that which had least to do with mundane affairs. This maxim rendered it necessary that there should be two codes of morals, one for ordinary persons, exposed to the ceaseless contaminations of the world, the other for such as aspired to the reputation of transcendent or heroic sanctity. It is true, even ordinary persons were not precluded from the ultimate possession of this nobler kind of life; but it was the distinction of superior natures to realize much of that mode of existence even on earth, and, as a consequence, to hold the things of earth, so valued by men in general, in small esteem. It was in this supposed energetic development of the faculties of the soul in relation to God, that the perfection of human nature was believed to consist; and whatever neglect of every-day duties, having reference to men only, was seen to result from the impulses of this holy enthusiasm, or rather this mystic pietism, appeared only as a lesser duty superseded by a greater. The philosopher had his tub, and the monk had his cell, and their vocation was in substance the same. Had Christians duly attended to the admonition of their great Teacher,

when saying—*This ought ye to have done, and not to have left the other undone*, their theology might have strengthened, but would never have impaired their philanthropy, nor would they have sought for the best evidence of piety in bodily exercise, or of morality in a mere crucifixion of the flesh. Paul exhorts men to be *instant in prayer*, and speaks of striving to *keep under the body;* but there is enough in his writings and in his life to suggest the restrictive sense in which such passages should be received.

And, unhappily, it was not enough that the notions of men, in regard to their duty to God, should be such as to produce a negligence of their duty to each other. Their mistakes on this point became productive of positive evils without number—of fanaticism, intolerance, and every evil work. The transition was easy from such a view of religion as warranted a neglect of moral obligation, to such as would warrant the most direct infringement of it, as is seen in the broad fact, that the strongest evidence of moral worth, and of sincere piety, availed nothing in the ages adverted to, if the one virtue of ecclesiastical obedience were wanting.

Well, also, would it be for the credit and the progress of our common faith, if the piety of our own day were more of that scriptural character which forbids that a man should profess to love God whom he hath not seen, while he loves not his brother whom he hath seen. But, alas! the

LECT. VII. evils we have noticed as so rife in other days, have most of them proved hereditary, and still meet us in shapes but too nearly the same. Let us lay to heart the exhortation of the apostle, and follow *whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, let us think on these things.*

LECTURE VIII.

ON THE CORRUPTION OF CHRISTIANITY FROM THE INFLUENCE OF ANCIENT PAGANISM.

LECTURE VIII.

ROMANS I. 25.

Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more (or rather) than the Creator.

Influence of Paganism more general than that of Philosophy.

In the view we have taken of the ancient systems of philosophy, and of their effects on Christianity, we have been conversant with the human mind almost exclusively in its state of cultivation. Education and learning may have varied in their character in different ages, and in different regions of the earth; but there is a sameness both of mental and moral impression which they never fail to produce, and it is with the mind as partaking of this impression that we have been chiefly engaged in the three preceding Lectures.

In our attempt to ascertain the effect of Paganism on Christianity, we shall still have to do with minds distinguished alike by their general intelligence, and by the bitterness of their opposition to the gospel. But this intelligence will be seen as that of a few, operating more immediately and

LECT. VIII. more successfully toward a corruption of the many. The abode of philosophy was in the schools; and its influence beyond them being always dependent on some degree of mental culture, it could reach the multitude but indirectly and partially. The domain of Paganism, on the contrary, was unbounded. It had its connexion with humanity wherever found, shaping itself to the varying circumstances of the mass of our species, however civilized or barbarous—whether luxuriating on the soil of Asia, shut in amid the forests of Germany, or thrown upon the frozen regions of the north.

In approaching this department of our subject, it may be proper to take a rapid view of the Paganism with which Christianity was to come in contact; we shall thus be prepared to mark the effect of these pre-established systems with regard to the Object and the Modes of Worship set forth in holy Scripture, and in relation to the Polity and the Morality which that authority has enjoined.

Review of ancient Paganism.

I. The works of the learned on the ORIGIN AND NATURE OF ANCIENT IDOLATRY are almost innumerable. It must be sufficient that we advert to a few of the more certain and important of their representations.

Its objects of worship.

We have ample proof that among the more enlightened men of antiquity there was a general persuasion as to the existence of one Supreme nature, to whom the popular divinities, and all

created things, were in more or less immediate subjection. The extent in which this vestige of primeval truth was retained is the only point open to debate. We know but too well, that this article was often grossly corrupted by those who professed to receive it; while by others it was sometimes virtually and sometimes openly rejected. On the people generally it produced little if any impression, the received notions in regard to the subordinate objects of worship, and the means of indulgence which that worship presented, being much more adapted to vulgar thought and propensity than refined speculations on the unity or the supremacy of the Godhead.

Hence many were agreed in rendering their homage to the heavenly bodies and elemental powers, generally representing them by means of animated natures. With others, departed men, who were supposed to have distinguished themselves as leaders or benefactors, were commemorated with similar honours. The worship of these two classes of objects—the merely symbolic, and properly human—was united, more or less, in every part of the world; and embraced a state of things to which admiration, gratitude, and fear, were perhaps equal contributors. The Persians, indeed, might be named as an exception to it; but their Mithra, or supreme deity, appears to have been identified with the sun; while their Oromasdes and Ariman partook clearly of the nature of subordinate divinities,

LECT. VIII. and, in the popular creed, were probably associated with others, which, if not served by means of temples and images, bore a near resemblance to the delegated powers confided in by other nations. The effect of poetry and art among the Greeks, was to humanize the symbolic objects which they had derived from their eastern progenitors.*

And it would be well if, having said thus much, we could stop. But human folly, and, we must add, human wickedness, have descended much lower. Men have not only changed the *glory of the incorruptible God into an image*

* "In the East, where the human form was attributed to "the gods (or the objects and powers of nature) it was but a "secondary affair, the indispensable means of presenting them "to the senses. It was never any thing more. And this is "the reason why those nations never hesitated to depart "from this human form, and to disfigure it, whenever it "seemed possible thereby to give a greater degree of distinct-"ness to the symbolic representation, or if any other object "could thus be more successfully accomplished. This is the "source of all those singular shapes which the gods of the "east generally assume. The Indian makes no scruple of "giving his gods twenty arms; the Phrygian represents his "Diana with as many breasts; the Egyptian gave them the "heads of beasts. Different as these disfigurations are, they "all have their origin in this: the human form was but a subor-"dinate object; the chief aim was a more distinct designation "(more distinct in the view of the east) of the symbol." It was the essential peculiarity of the popular religion of the Greeks, and we may say of the western nations generally, that "they gradually dismissed the symbolical representations, "and not only dismissed them, but adopted something more "human in their stead."—Heeren on Ancient Greece, c. iii.

made like unto corruptible man, but into *birds, and beasts, and creeping things*. Yes, and from this mistaken homage toward the merely animate, they have fallen in prostration before the inanimate, conferring a sort of divinity on rivers, and lakes, and fountains, on hills and valleys, on groves and forests;—all these partaking of this character, as things deemed sacred to certain imaginary beings who were supposed to preside over them.

Immoral tendency of ancient Paganism.

The imagination, freed thus from the restraints of reason, became a willing servant to the lusts of the flesh and of the mind. The gods which it called into existence, shared in all the vice, as well as the feebleness of their votaries, being reflections of human depravity, instead of models for human improvement. In the complexion of affairs thus produced, the sensual and the spiritual, the present and the future, were so mixed with each other, as to present the appearance of a moral chaos:—or we may perhaps say, that it almost seemed as though devised for the very purpose of teaching men that the rewards appropriate to virtue would be attendant on the sensualities, the injustice, and the flagrant crime which had so long debased and afflicted the earth; for according to the system of idolatry which pervaded the ancient world, these vices have not only a place in heaven, but are among the most conspicuous attributes of the very gods who preside there. The wonder accordingly is,

LECT. VIII. not that the morals of the heathen world should have been such as we find them, but rather that they did not become even more corrupt.

Number of the Pagan deities.

The number of these deities, public and domestic, was indefinite. In Egypt they were said to be more numerous than the inhabitants; and the same might almost have been said of Rome, when that city became the metropolis of the world. Indeed, the increase of the objects of worship, was generally proportioned to the advances of civilization, the multiplication of the wants of men in their more artificial state of existence begetting a multiplication of these supposed almoners and protectors.

Pagan priesthood.

The priests, on whom devolved the care of the temples, and the superintendence of every thing relating to the worship of the gods, were not only a separate order of persons, but possessed important privileges. The terrors of superstition, which rendered them so dominant in most barbarous states, were commonly much softened in more civilized communities.* But generally, these persons attached to themselves the reputation of eminent sanctity, and were regarded as possessing a peculiar influence with the powers to whose service they were presumed to be devoted. Hence, with the proper office of the priest, which was to do honour to the gods by presenting sacrifices and offerings,

* This exception occurs no where so observably as among the Greeks.—Heeren on Ancient Greece, c. iii.

the functions of a prophet were frequently associated, and sometimes those of magistracy. Every one has heard of the responses which priests affected to obtain from oracles, and of the pretensions to a knowledge of futurity which were made by Augurs and Aruspices; and the state of Druidism in the age of Cæsar and Lucan is an instructive example of the secular as well as spiritual domination which a barbarian priesthood could sometimes assume. Among the priests of antiquity, there was every gradation of authority. In Rome, especially, we ascend from the mere noviciate, to the college of pontiffs, and to the Pontifex Maximus. On that college it devolved to exercise a general superintendence over the matters included in the national worship. The Pontifex Maximus, is the designation which the pagan emperors were always proud to adopt. It is too obvious not to be perceived, that the existence of these functionaries did much to prepare the way for a college of cardinals, and a sovereign pontiff under another name.

Pagan worship.

We have adverted to the character of the objects of worship among the nations of antiquity, and from the attributes ascribed to these supposed existences, it would not be difficult to anticipate the kind of homage that would be rendered to them. Since to deprecate the wrath, or obtain the favour of these powers, would be the intention of every act of worship, the manner

LECT. VIII. of approaching them would naturally be such as was conceived to be most acceptable to beings of such a character. As were the divinities, so would be the worship. Where ambition was presumed to be a leading feature, costly and obsequious services would be performed. Where vanity was the ascendant passion, ostentatious ceremonies would be instituted. The impure would be worshipped by acts of impurity, and the malevolent would be propitiated by bloody sacrifices, — perhaps by human victims. In the popular divinities, human folly and human wickedness were exhibited as triumphant, connected with a power at once lawless and irresistible. Hence the acts of worship, even among the most polished nations of antiquity, embraced not a little of that adulatory kind of homage with which tyrants are gratified; and beside including much that was insignificant and vain, they were frequently disgraced by the lowest sensualities, and sometimes by the most relentless cruelty. Very little did the forms of pagan worship present at all favourable to the end proposed in every rational plan of government. It is true, the almost uninterrupted recurrence of games and festivals was highly grateful to the people; but these, which were always most numerous in the most corrupt times, were shrewdly encouraged as adapted to beguile the multitude into a forgetfulness of every nobler pursuit, and as means of rendering them content

in subjection to their present masters, both civil and religious. The pomp and circumstance of these customs may have conduced, in so far as their attractiveness operated in the way of a patronage on science and genius, to some artificial improvement. But the splendour of an equipage does not render imbecility the less contemptible, nor vice the less pernicious.

Pagan mysteries.

Beside the worship of the gods, in which the people generally were allowed to join, there were certain secret rites which were called *mysteries*, and to which the initiated only were admitted. All who had passed through the tedious, and frequently severe discipline, preliminary to their being present at the celebration of the mysteries, were bound to silence, even at the peril of their lives, on the subject of the disclosures that were made to them. It will not, therefore, be matter of surprise, if the accounts which have descended to us with regard to the nature of those disclosures are found imperfect and contradictory. The different opinions broached by the learned, will perhaps warrant the conclusion, that the object of these associations in the earliest stages of their history, was very frequently, if not generally, to enforce on the parties admitted to them, by some unusual means, the great lessons of intellectual and social improvement, and even to communicate doctrines more reasonable than the popular creed, and above the popular apprehension, on

LECT. VIII. the subject of religion. But it must be confessed, that the evidence in support of this more favourable view of the heathen mysteries in their primitive state, is less decisive than that which shows them to have been disgraced at a latter period by every secret abomination. The esteem in which they were generally held, so late as to the commencement of the christian era, rendered them a formidable impediment to the progress of the gospel. But as the empire declined, it was sufficiently ascertained that the boasted purity of these worshippers in secret places was far from being proof against the growing corruption of the times.*

Summary of this review.

Such, in brief, were the systems of paganism with which primitive Christianity had to contend;—and they may be compared to the several departments of a vast citadel, strong in every means of defence which art or nature could supply, and which seemed to frown defiance on every possible mode of assault. It was an order of things wonderfully adjusted to act on the hopes and fears, on the natural tendencies, and even on the cultivated tastes of men, so as to make all these sources of energy and action tributary to its power. It could restrain by terror, or gratify by indulgence; and while adapting itself to the

* Hill's Lectures on the Institutions of Ancient Greece, *passim*.—Heeren, c. iii. pp. 55—59. But the reader desirous of the best information on this subject should consult the valuable Essay relating to it by St. Croix.

lowest appetite of the multitude, could present suitable inducements to the more intellectual, the imaginative, and the ambitious. Where it failed to commend itself as true, it often obtained the credit of being useful, either as serving to strengthen some of the most important relations of society, or as giving the sanction of religion to so much of what an apostle describes as *the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life*. It had thus been moulded into a state of friendly agreement with *the course of this world*. Hence it must not be expected to yield its place to the opposite influence of Christianity, but by slow degrees; every where making an obstinate resistance, and every where retaining no small influence over the religious character and manners even of such as professed to have disowned its authority. The injury sustained by Christianity from this source with respect to the OBJECT of worship, is the topic to which our attention must be restricted in the present Lecture.

Influence of Paganism in regard to the object of worship among Christians.

II. Correct views of the Divine *nature*, constitute the only foundation of proper obedience to the Divine *will*. Hence, misconception with regard to the object of worship, must attach its consequences to our character and conduct. Until well instructed on the subject of the Divine perfections, we must continue incapable of judging with respect to the claims they possess on our homage and confidence; while false

LECT. VIII. views can only produce false impressions, and lead to mistaken effort. Men must *know God*, before they can *glorify him as God*:—and it is in this connexion between knowledge and sanctity that we find the profound import of the Redeemer's emphatic saying—*This is life eternal, to know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.*

Source of the diversities in the objects of heathen worship.

The contrast between the great object of worship made known in Holy Scripture, and the gods of ancient heathenism, suggests the most humiliating conclusions in reference to the present condition of human nature. Those fictitious beings, whom all men delighted to honour, were of different character in different regions; the particular forms under which they were exhibited being plainly the effect of mere circumstance, such as climate, country, and the state of society. But in the history of these modifications, there was little that we can describe as an approach toward the truth. Outbreaks from the more beaten path were not unfrequent, but they were generally in a wrong direction, only serving to vary the forms of error. The deities of civilized states were less barbarian in their character than those of savage tribes; but they were not at all less perfidious, and much more sensual;—the vices of barbarism giving place to others belonging to a state of more luxurious depravity.

It should be added, moreover, that as the gods

of different nations became, in this manner, the offspring and reflection of national character, so the separate deities of each nation possessed the properties by which they were distinguished, as the effect of the particular tendencies or temperament dominant in certain classes of the communities in which they were acknowledged. For while there are causes which give a character to nations, there are others which produce considerable modifications of that general character in the classes, both larger and smaller, of which every nation is composed:—and the process by which the gods of every people have been so readily assimilated to the likeness of their worshippers, extends itself below the mass, and fails not to meet the particular cravings of an Alexander or a Diogenes, adapting its results with equal ease to the self-denial of one man, and the self-indulgence of another.

Idolatry the natural effect of human depravity.

It is impossible, therefore, that we should judge comprehensively or justly with regard to the danger to which revealed truth on the subject of the Divine nature was exposed in its conflict with the errors of heathenism, if we regard those errors merely in the light of certain speculative opinions, capriciously adopted, and as capriciously retained. On the contrary, these false views must be seen as having their origin in the strong—the overruling propensities, either natural or acquired, of the people and the classes by whom they are maintained. Beside

LECT. VIII. the difficulty of inducing men to abandon opinions once openly avowed, and consecrated as the faith of their predecessors, there was the far greater difficulty arising from the alliance of these opinions with personal inclinations — inclinations that would be sacrificed as reluctantly as *a right hand, or a right eye.* Hence, when the ancient heathen were called upon to receive the gospel, it was not merely an alteration of creed that was demanded, but an alteration of character. The change insisted on was not so much speculative as practical; the renunciation of their gods, being only a formal act, expressive of the most difficult of all achievements—the denial of themselves!

Nothing was presumed to have been ascertained, except as matter of plausible conjecture, concerning the Infinite Nature supposed to preside over the popular divinities. The Athenian altar, with its inscription TO THE UNKNOWN GOD, is sufficient evidence of this fact. The uncertainty of every known conception on this momentous subject, was felt by the philosopher and the multitude, often inducing a species of atheism in the former, and disposing the latter to an undivided reliance on the less mysterious existences which appealed to their passions and their senses in the received mythology.

Two evils to be feared from these causes.

There were two evils to be especially apprehended from these leading facts, with regard to the doctrine of Scripture concerning the Divine character. In the first place, there was much

room to fear, lest the tendency which had taught men to attribute their own passions to the objects of their idolatry, should lead them to view their Maker as being *such a one as themselves*, more than according to the revelation truly made of him;—that they should corrupt the testimony of revelation, as they had corrupted the testimony of nature. In the second place, it might well be doubted whether, having so done, they would not at length supersede the government and worship of Jehovah by some idolatrous introduction of created natures. Men of old *did not like to retain God in their knowledge*, and the consequence of their wilful ignorance with respect to the Divine perfections was, that they learned to *worship the creature more than the Creator*. When large classes, and even nations of men, became professors of Christianity, the causes which had produced the various systems of creature-worship would not cease to exist;—the principal difference would be, in most instances, that the future sphere of their operation would be with the announcements of Scripture, and not with the principles of natural religion. LECT. VIII.

False views of the Divine character thus induced.

Of the force with which the first of these tendencies would operate, we may judge from the marked effects which are constantly resulting from it within our own observation. We find our contemporaries generally solicitous that the evidence on the side of opinions which lend a sanction to their favourite inclinations should

LECT. VIII. appear strong and decisive; and, as a consequence, it is manifest that the views which obtain among them in relation to the Divine nature, are in no small degree the effect of mere temperament and habit. An exception must of course be made, in favour of such as are divinely taught;—but an exception in part only, for how large is the admixture of folly, and, we may add, of pernicious delusion, in the religion even of these persons, and evidently proceeding from the source to which we now advert!

If the depravity, or, to use a more expressive term, the *ungodliness* of human nature, has this influence in disposing men to corrupt the truth amid the many advantages peculiar to our age and country, we may conjecture what its effect would be amid the great comparative disadvantages of the heathen multitudes who became early converts to our faith. If the creed of the majority professing Christianity now, be a matter moulded according to their wishes or their tastes, more than according to evidence,—so that in some instances the clemency of the Most High is made to preclude the exercise of any other moral attribute; while, in the view of others, his mercy, if put forth at all, is restricted to the smallest possible development, his glory being connected almost exclusively with the wide and ever-withering desolations of his wrath;—if, in a word, there can scarcely be a conception of Deity so extravagant or absurd, as not to find its zealous defenders

among the men and women of our time; what might we not fear, in respect to those professors of Christianity in distant ages, the great majority of whom never saw a Bible except in the hand of a preacher, who, had that volume been placed before them, would have been incapable of deciphering its contents; and who, in addition to the depravity common to mankind, had formed their habits of thought, of sympathy, and of action, under the influence of scenes and usages directly antichristian in every conceivable point? Of such a people might we not in truth say, that, as were the gods whom they had worshipped in their heathenism, so, in too many respects, and in too large a measure, would be the object of their worship, even when they had learnt to say, *What have we any more to do with idols?* With that large proportion whose assumption of the christian name would be the effect of mere circumstances, this result followed as matter of course; and but too much of the same leaven would assuredly remain, even in those who were influenced, upon the whole, by a devout sincerity in their new vocation. LECT. VIII.

From these firmly rooted prepossessions, the popular apprehension would be materially influenced in relation to the point of which we have just spoken, viz. the respective claims of the Divine justice and mercy. As paganism had taught the barbarian mind to regard the Deity in the light of an heroic leader, and the civilized

LECT. VIII. mind to view the powers presiding over human affairs as no less fond of soft indulgences than mortals themselves; so, on becoming merely nominal Christians, the new object of veneration introduced would be regarded, by such men, as in some measure partaking of the attributes which they had been wont to look upon as the glory of the old. Many of the early Christians saw this course of things, and protested against it; not a few of them proceeding to the length of refusing to bear arms under any circumstances, that they might place themselves at the farthest remove from those who would confound the God of the Scriptures with the gods of war; while others strove to counteract the ensnaring force of the social affections, and of the senses generally, by escaping into solitude, and by the severest discipline in the way of abstinence and self-denial. Both these parties erred by excess on the one hand, as the consequence of an ill-regulated opposition to the errors into which the greater number of avowed Christians had fallen on the other. Of this greater number, the one part would have made Christianity subserve the views and enterprises of men who delight in war; and the other part would have made its spirit and maxims conformable with the character and manners of such as seek no better portion than the poor indulgences of a sensual life. The reign of Charlemagne, and the subsequent history of the Crusades, afford sufficient illustration of the ease with which the

passions and the imagination of men can assimilate the revealed character of deity to the Mars of one region, or the Odin of another; while the marked ascendancy of every sort of licentiousness through many centuries, when the nations of Europe were loud in their professions as good Christians, is a further evidence of the readiness with which humanity can exclude every purer and nobler view of the Divine nature, as the consequence of its determined preference of the present to the future, of the sensual to the spiritual, of the creature to the Creator.

It appears, then, as the sum of our statement on this particular, that, while the Divine nature, as revealed in Scripture, is consistent and the same, men are ever disposed to look partially on this transcendent exhibition of it, and not only to magnify such of its aspects as may be more agreeable to their inclinations and their tastes, but to overlook, or wholly to exclude, whatever it may embrace of a different character. The result is, that the nature of the Divine Being is not only different in the view of one professedly christian man, from what it is in the view of another; but that often the one is the direct contradiction of the other; and, which is more, that both are frequently at an equal remove from the truth. In this statement, little more is affirmed than that the tendencies which led men into the errors of paganism, have continued to operate, so as to produce a mixture of those errors with their

LECT. VIII. better faith as Christians. What the more imbecile and vicious forms of paganism were, in comparison with what is meant by the terms, natural religion; that the corrupt forms of Christianity may be said to be, in comparison with the Christianity of Holy Writ; and the causes which produced so memorable a deterioration of the former, are just those which have operated with the same effect upon the latter.

Paganism produces the theory and practice of creature-worship in the church.

But the influence of paganism with respect to the revealed character of God, is not its only, and perhaps not its most injurious effect in reference to the proper object of worship. It has taught men to believe that, beside the One glorious Being revealed in Scripture, there are others to whom worship should be rendered. These, it is admitted, possess subordinate claims only, because possessed of no more than delegated power; but even these, it is insisted, are properly entitled to the most formal acts of adoration. In proportion to the elevation or abstraction of the conceptions which men have formed with respect to the Supreme Existence, has generally been their solicitude, that the impression of the awful distance which separates between their own insignificance and so much greatness, should be in some way softened or diminished. In this exigency of human feeling, the expedient which has every where presented itself, is the intervention of other powers, richly endowed, perhaps, but possessing more in common with what pertains to

the character and the present lot of humanity. LECT. VIII.
Men have ever been disposed to embody their objects of worship, and in doing so have always taken humanity as their model. The worship of pure abstractions has been limited to a comparatively small portion of our race; the general disposition has been to humanize the supernatural as much as possible, even to the extent of attributing to it the infirmities and vices of our present fallen state. It is to this feeling, more than to any other cause, that we have to ascribe the prevalence of creature-worship. It is to such worship that the habits of the reflecting and the heedless alike tend, if strangers to an inspired guidance. The degree in which men have risen in their conceptions of the infinite and the morally perfect, has generally been the degree in which they have found it difficult to suppose that the affairs of human life, usually so trivial, and sometimes so atrocious, are really subject to the immediate superintendence of such a power. On the other hand, where there has not been capacity for rising to any adequate thought concerning a transcendent and purely spiritual nature, nothing has been left to call forth the imperishable sympathies of the human mind with the invisible, in some one or other of its forms, except certain passing phantoms of humanized being.

Hence, it was the work of paganism to people every region of earth and heaven, and even the realms beneath, with natures participating in the

LECT. VIII. strength and weakness, and in the good and evil, which we find to be inseparable from humanity. From the great Jove himself to the meanest household god, an immense gradation was perceived, every space of which was sedulously occupied in the vision of the pagan worshipper. Male and female, youth and age, parent and child, all the relations of human life, and all the varieties of human character, and of human achievement, were among the things which gave to the popular system of theology its texture and completeness. By the agency of these different powers,—which extended itself, not only to the great and small in the secrets of nature, and the movements of providence on the earth, but to the invisible regions,—the hand of the great Creator was wholly excluded, and men were taught to live *without God in the world.*

Now that a state of things in all material points the counterpart of what we have just described has had existence, and continues to exist, in connexion with the profession of Christianity, is as little questionable as any fact in history, or any matter of daily observation. In our own land, the shrines of the Virgin, and of a multitude of saints, have so far engrossed the homage of our forefathers, as to leave no room for any proper dependence on the one Mediator, and to shut out the mass of the people from all attempt toward any immediate worship of the nature which is proclaimed as *Eternal, Immortal, and*

Invisible. And that this resemblance might be entire, wanting nothing, these new divinities were all visibly represented by means of paintings or images, before which their votaries bowed down to worship, by whose agency miracles were said to be wrought, and about whose shrines, after the same pagan model, an abundance of votive offerings might be seen, setting forth the gratitude of parties professing to have been recipients of miraculous benefits. LECT. VIII.

" The noblest heathen temple now remaining in the world," says Dr. Middleton,* " is the " Pantheon, or Rotunda, which, as the inscrip- " tion over the portico informs us, having been " impiously dedicated of old, by Agrippa, to " Jove and all the gods, was piously consecrated " by St. Boniface the Fourth to the blessed " Virgin and all Saints. With this single " alteration, it serves as exactly for all the " purposes of the popish, as it did for the " pagan worship, for which it was built. For " as in the old temple, every one might find " the god of his country, and address himself " to that deity whose religion he was most " devoted to, so it is the same thing now ; every " one chooses the patron whom he likes best, " and one may see here different services going " on at the same time at different altars, with " distinct congregations around them, just as

* Letter from Rome.

LECT. VIII. " the inclinations of the people lead them to " the worship of this or that particular saint.

" And as it is in the Pantheon, so is it in all " the other heathen temples that still remain in " Rome; they have only pulled down one idol " to set up another, and changed rather the " name than the object of their worship. Thus " the little temple of Vesta, near the Tiber, " mentioned by Horace, is now possessed by the " Madonna of the Sun; that of the Fortuna " Virilis, by Mary the Egyptian; that of Saturn " (where the public treasure was anciently kept) " by St. Adrian; that of Romulus and Remus, " in the Via Sacra, by two other brothers, " Cosmas and Damianus; that of Antonine the " Godly by Laurence the Saint.

" At the foot of Mount Palatin, in the way " between the Forum and the Circus Maximus, " on the very spot where Romulus was believed " to have been suckled by the wolf, there stands " another little round temple, dedicated to him " in the early times of the republic, into which, " from the present elevation of the soil without, " we now descend by a great number of steps. " It is mentioned by Dionysius of Halicarnassus, " who says that, in his time, there stood in it a " brazen statue, of antique work, of the wolf " giving suck to the infant brothers, which is " thought by many to be the same which is still " preserved and shown in the Capitol. From " the tradition of the wonderful escape which

" Romulus had in this very place, when exposed LECT. VIII.
" in his infancy to perish in the Tiber, as soon
" as he came to be a god, he was looked upon
" as singularly propitious to the health and
" safety of young children ; from which notion,
" it became a practice for nurses and mothers to
" present their sickly infants before his shrine in
" this little temple, in confidence of a cure or
" relief by his favour. Now, when this temple
" was converted afterwards into a church, lest
" any piece of superstition should be lost, or
" the people think themselves sufferers by the
" change, in losing the benefit of such a pro-
" tection for their children, care was taken to
" find out, in the place of the heathen god,
" a christian saint, who had been exposed too
" in his infancy, and found by chance, like
" Romulus, and for the same reason might be
" just as fond of children as their old deity had
" been : and thus the worship paid to Romulus,
" being now transferred to Theodorus, the old
" superstition still subsists, and the custom of
" presenting children at this shrine continues to
" this day without intermission ; of which I
" myself have been a witness, having seen, as
" oft as I looked into this church, ten or a dozen
" women, decently dressed, each with a child in
" her lap, sitting with silent reverence before the
" altar of the saint, in expectation of his mira-
" culous influence on the health of the infant.

" But their temples," continues the same

LECT. VIII. writer, " are not the only places where we see
" the proofs and overt acts of their superstition;
" the whole face of the country has the visible
" characters of paganism upon it; and wherever
" we look about us, we cannot but find, as
" St. Paul did at Athens, clear evidence of its
" being possessed by a superstitious and idola-
" trous people. The old Romans, we know,
" had their gods, who presided peculiarly over
" the roads, streets, and highways, called Viales,
" Semitales, Compitales; whose little temples
" or altars, decked with flowers, or whose statues,
" at least, coarsely carved of wood or stone,
" were placed at convenient distances in the
" public ways, for the benefit of travellers, who
" used to step aside to pay their devotions to
" these rural shrines, and beg a prosperous
" journey, and safety in their travels. Now
" this custom prevails still so generally in all
" popish countries, but especially in Italy, that
" one can see no other difference between the
" old and present superstition, than that of
" changing the name of the deity, and christen-
" ing, as it were, the old *Hecate in triviis*, by
" the new name of *Maria in trivio*, by which
" title I have observed one of their churches
" dedicated in this city; and as the heathens
" used to paint over the ordinary statues of their
" gods with red, or some such gay colour, so I
" have oft observed the coarse images of these
" saints so daubed over with a gaudy red as to

" resemble exactly the description of the god LECT. VIII.
" Pan in Virgil :—

' Sanguineis ebuli baccis minioque rubentem.'—Ecl. x.

" In passing along the road, it is common to
" see travellers on their knees before these rustic
" altars, which none ever presume to approach
" without some act of reverence; and those who
" are most in haste, or at a distance, are sure to
" pull off their hats, at least, in token of respect.

" But what gave me still the greater notion of
" the superstition of these countries, was to see
" those little oratories, or rural shrines, some-
" times placed under the cover of a tree or
" grove, agreeably to the descriptions of the old
" idolatry, in the sacred as well as profane
" writers, or more generally raised on some
" eminence, or, in the phrase of Scripture, on
" high places, the constant scene of idolatrous
" worship in all ages; it being an universal
" opinion among the heathens, that the gods
" in a peculiar manner loved to reside on emi-
" nences or tops of mountains: which pagan
" notion prevails still so generally with the
" Papists, that there is hardly a rock or pre-
" cipice, how dreadful or difficult soever of
" access, that has not an oratory, or altar, or
" crucifix at least, planted on the top of it.

" Among the rugged mountains of the Alps,
" very near to a little town called Modana,
" there stands, on the top of a rock, a chapel,

LECT VIII. " with a miraculous image of Our Lady, which is " visited with great devotion by the people, and " sometimes, we were told, by the king himself; " being famous, it seems, for a miracle of a " singular kind, viz. the restoring of dead-born " children to life; but so far only as to make " them capable of baptism, after which they " again expire."

One more extract from this memorable Letter by Dr. Middleton must suffice on the point now under our notice:—" When we enter their " towns," he observes, " the case is still the " same as it was in the country; we find every " where the same marks of idolatry, and the " same reason to make us fancy that we are " still treading pagan ground; whilst at every " corner we see images and altars, with lamps " or candles burning before them, exactly " answering to the descriptions of the ancient " writers, and to what Tertullian reproaches the " heathen with, that their streets, their markets, " their baths, were not without an idol. But, " above all, in the pomp and solemnity of their " holidays, and especially their religious proces- " sions, we see the genuine remains of heathen- " ism, and proof enough to convince us that " this is still the same Rome which old Numa " first tamed and civilized by the arts of religion; " who, as Plutarch says, ' by the institution of " supplications and processions to the gods, which " inspire reverence, whilst they give pleasure to

" the spectators, and by pretended miracles, and LECT. VIII.
" divine apparitions, reduced the fierce spirits of
" his subjects under the power of superstition.' "

It may occur, that in the tone of these remarks, the writer betrays somewhat of the asperity of the controversialist. Their substantial accuracy, however, is not to be impeached. The same ground has been very recently traversed by an author, who, in giving the result of his observations to the world, expresses himself " afraid lest that should be taken for a polemical, which was only intended for a literary essay." But notwithstanding the greater urbanity, and, perhaps, the greater candour, of the production thus introduced, its effect is only to give more detail and completeness to what the " Letter from Rome " had previously supplied on the same subject—showing that the lapse of another half century in the history of European civilization has left Italy strictly in its old position with respect to religion.

" As I descended from the Alps," says the author of ' Vestiges of Ancient Manners and Customs in Italy,' " I was admonished of my
" entrance into Italy by a little chapel to the
" Madonna, built upon a rock by the road side;
" and from that time till I repassed this chain of
" mountains, I received almost hourly proof that
" I was wandering amongst the descendants of
" that people which is described by Cicero to
" have been the most religious of mankind.

LECT. VIII. " Though the mixture of religion with all the
" common events of life is any thing but an
" error, yet I could not avoid regretting that,
" like their heathen ancestors, the modern
" Italians had supplied the place of one great
" Master mover by a countless host of inferior
" agents. The multiplication of gods, in the
" first instance, may seem to have arisen from
" the incorrect idea which unassisted reason was
" likely to form of the Deity, by transferring to
" the powers of the unseen world the same
" qualities and imperfections which belong to
" the noblest of visible animals—the passions
" and infirmities of helpless man. For as the
" human individual can but accomplish a limited
" number of actions; limited by his disposition
" to do good or evil; by his bodily and mental
" capacities; by space and time; so did it
" become necessary that the gods, who were
" thought to labour under the same difficulties,
" though not in the same degree, should be
" proportionally multiplied. Thus to one was
" ascribed the blight of a crop; to another its
" increase; one was vested with the empire of
" the winds, another with that of the waves: to
" one were assigned the phenomena of fire; to
" a second those of vegetation; to a third
" those of war. Nay, even a fever or a cough
" were made subjects of apotheosis.

" But in proportion to the number of these
" new divinities, and the subdivision of their

" power and functions, their supposed elevation LECT. VIII.
" above the rank and condition of mankind grew
" less. Mankind grew less afraid of applying to
" them for trifles ; and suitable engines of im-
" portunity, oblations, ornaments, and pecuniary
" presents to themselves or their accredited
" servants, became the recognized and usual way
" of seeking for those worldly favours which,
" except in general terms, and with much doubt
" and self-submission, none should venture to
" solicit from the great God and Sovereign of
" the universe.

" To this natural progress of erroneous belief
" the craft of man contributed. Amongst the
" heathens every shrine had its priest ; and as
" these priests were generally maintained by the
" offerings brought to the altars of their respec-
" tive patrons, they, of course, became deeply
" pledged to uphold a system which furnished
" them with the means of subsistence, if not of
" profusion.

" It is lamentable to observe in how many
" particulars this picture is true of modern Italy
" and Sicily ; where in spite of that knowledge
" of the one and only God which revelation has
" communicated, the same tendency to poly-
" theism (for the worship of saints has all the
" character of that creed in practice, however
" ingeniously it may be explained), is still mani-
" fested ; and where the same abuses as those
" which have been already enumerated, abun-

LECT. VIII. " dantly prevail. On the one hand, imper-
" tinent and unworthy solicitations of divine
" interference ; on the other, encouragement in
" such a practice by self-interested individuals.
" Priests ill-paid, and hordes of friars, mendi-
" cants by profession, have been tempted to lay
" under heavy contribution the credulity of the
" public ; and accordingly we find most cathe-
" drals, as well as nearly all the chapels of the
" regular clergy, possessed of images or relics
" said to be endowed with miraculous virtues,
" while a box is at hand to receive the offer-
" ings of those who, out of gratitude for the
" past, or hope for the future, are disposed to
" give their mite for the good of the Church. I
" have seen the poor fishermen at Catania regu-
" larly greeted, on their arrival at the coast, with
" the produce of their day's toils, by the craving
" voice of a Capuchin or Franciscan ; nor has
" that been refused to the holy vagrant which
" ordinary beggars, though wrung with distress,
" would have sought in vain. Indeed, few per-
" sons are so poor as to escape subscribing their
" quota towards filling the satchels of these men,
" or so fearless of the consequent anger of
" Heaven, as to risk a denial.

" The general effects of this unhappy system
" have been, to degrade the worship of the
" Deity—to swell the calendar with saints—to
" extend the influence of charms—to instigate
" pilgrimages—to clothe the altars with votive

" tablets—and to give currency to the numbers LECT. VIII.
" of miracles, which have not a shadow of testi-
" mony to their truth. In short, it has made
" the countries of Italy and Sicily what they are,
" emblems of the churches in them, replete
" themselves with beauty, yet serving as vast
" magazines for objects calculated to excite
" the devotion of the superstitious, the pity of
" the wise and good, and the scoffs of the
" profane." *

The writer who thus expresses himself then proceeds to a fuller description and comparison, commencing with the very fertile subject—the *saints*. These, considered with respect to their numbers, their reputed lives, the places and objects over which they preside, their miraculous powers, and in some other particulars, are shown to bear " a wonderful resemblance to the gods of old Rome." The complaint of Juvenal, that the gods had become too numerous for Atlas himself to bear, is shown to be one no less applicable to the saints by whom those gods have been thrust from their ascendency; while the fabulous interviews between Diana and Endymion, between Bacchus and Ariadne, between Venus and Adonis, and many more of the pagan divinities, are also shown to have their parallels, in not a few respects, in the impious tales generally believed concerning certain miraculous appearances said to

* Blunt's Vestiges of Ancient Manners and Customs discoverable in Modern Italy and Sicily, pp. 1—6.

LECT. VIII. have been vouchsafed by the divine Redeemer to several female devotees. The high places and fountains, so sacred to ancient paganism, continue, as stated by Middleton, to be no less so to modern catholicism; and while not only every nation and province, but every city and town, has its guardian saint, the system is exhibited as extending itself, according to the ancient model, to every house, and almost to every apartment. "The "prodigious number of small images and house-"hold gods which are still in existence," says the writer last cited, "shows the extent to which "they were adopted in the domestic system of "the Romans: for them a corner was reserved "in their principal living-rooms; and I scarcely "remember a single house or shop in Pompeii "in which there is not a niche for their recep-"tion. To this day, then, the shops and houses "of Italy and Sicily are no less scrupulously "provided with a figure or painting of a Ma-"donna, or saint, whose good offices it is not "unusual further to propitiate by keeping a lamp "burning before them without intermission."*

The remarks of this intelligent author on the causes which have led to the idolatrous homage so commonly paid to the Virgin Mother in Catholic countries, and especially in Italy, are so relevant to the main object of these Lectures, that I must venture to extract them.

* Pp. 7—25.

LECT. VIII.

" Few phenomena in the christian world," says Mr. Blunt, " have seemed to me more extraor-
" dinary, than that the Madonna should have
" usurped, in all Catholic countries, but particu-
" larly in Italy and Sicily, so much of that rever-
" ence which is only due to the three persons of
" the Trinity. To pay such respect to the me-
" mory of the mother of our Lord as we owe to
" a creature selected by the Spirit of God for the
" mysteries of the incarnation, is highly proper ;
" and, by the better informed Catholics, perhaps
" such respect is all that is offered. At the same
" time none can be so blind as not to perceive
" that the honours assigned to the Madonna by
" the Italians in general, are of a very different
" description. Are they in danger ? upon her
" they call for help. Have they experienced any
" signal deliverance ? to her influence it is
" ascribed. The most splendid of their proces-
" sions are dedicated to her glory ; the oaths they
" utter in conversation are commonly in her
" name ; their first exclamation of wonder or of
" grief is, *Santa Maria !* Whence does all this
" proceed ? Perhaps it is only to be accounted
" for by the nature of the religion of ancient
" Rome. It may be remarked that Gentilism
" comprehended a vast variety of female deities,
" some of which were not less powerful, nor less
" the objects of propitiation and prayer, nor
" placed in a lower rank in the scale of divinity,
" than the greatest of the gods of the other sex.

LECT. VIII. " On the contrary, the superiority of females was
" established in Egypt as a civil and religious
" institution, and the same order is observed in
" Plutarch's Treatise of Isis and Osiris.* A pre-
" cedence thus given to the female deities in
" Egypt would probably have its operation in
" Italy also; a proposition of which no person
" will entertain much doubt who has observed
" the proportion which the gods of the Nile bear
" in every museum of Italian antiquities, to those
" of Greece and Rome. Indeed, when Isis and
" Serapis were united in one temple in the capital
" of Italy, priority of place was assumed by the
" queen. It is natural, therefore, to suppose
" that mankind, long retaining a propensity to
" relapse into idolatry, would endeavour to find
" some substitute for an important class of beings,
" which had for so many years exercised undis-
" puted empire over the minds and passions of
" men who, from climate and temperament, were
" perhaps peculiarly disposed to render the fair
" portion of the inhabitants of heaven a chivalrous
" obedience. The religion of Christianity, how-
" ever, as it was taught by our Saviour and his
" immediate followers, afforded no stock on which
" this part of heathen mythology could be grafted.
" None of the three persons of the Trinity could,
" without much effort, be moulded into the form
" of a goddess; and the circumstance, that some
" ancient heretics actually did maintain the Holy

* Vide Gibbon, Vol. V. p. 103, *note*.

" Ghost to be a female, only serves to show the LECT. VIII.
" reluctance with which mankind bade adieu to
" that sex as objects of worship. On the other
" hand, the Virgin presented such an opportunity
" as could hardly escape the penetration of any
" age, much less of one which could call *Barnabas*
" *Jupiter, and Paul Mercurius, because he was*
" *the chief speaker.* And, indeed, we find that
" a sect of persons named Colyridians arose
" amongst the Arabians before the end of the
" fourth century, who offered cakes to the
" Virgin Mary as a goddess, and the Queen of
" Heaven.* When we consider, therefore, on
" the one side, the natural disposition of converts
" from paganism to mingle and confound the
" religion they had quitted with that they had
" espoused; and, on the other, the willingness
" which sincere but ill-judging Christians, such
" as Gregory Thaumaturgus, displayed to come
" to an accommodation with the pagans, in hopes
" that time and improved knowledge might lead
" them to a purer faith;† we shall not be sur-
" prised to find that many of the rites, and much
" of the reverence, which attached to several of
" the female deities of old, should have been
" concentrated in favour of the Madonna. An
" error so likely to arise in the common course
" of things, was, perhaps, confirmed by the title
" of Θεοτοκὸς, and Mater Dei, which was assigned

* Vid. Jortin's Eccles. Rem. Vol. I. 332.

† Vid. Suicer. verb. εἰκὼν.

LECT. VIII. " to the Virgin without scruple, till the famous " Nestorian controversy brought the subject into " debate, and occasioned the council of Ephesus, " in 428, which, after all, decided that the terms " might be used with propriety.

" As this epithet in pagan times was applied " to Cybele, and as that goddess, from her pri- " mitive regard for the ancestors of the Romans,

(Iliacas Mater amavit opes—
Ilium, the mighty Mother ever loved,)

" was held in peculiar honour in the capital of the " world, and celebrated there with a magnificence " agreeable to the importance of her character—

Illa Deos peperit . . . . cessere parenti,
Principiumque dati mater honoris habet,
Ov. Fast. IV. 360.

The gods she bore—to her the immortal race
Resigned the honours of the foremost place,

" so does it seem almost inevitable that some " confusion in the minds of half-enlightened per- " sons would ensue, in consequence of so singular " an identity of name."*

Mr. Blunt further remarks, on the connexion between the ancient pagan custom of begging for " the mother of the gods," and the very general modern practice of begging " for the Madonna." " And there is," he adds, " yet another coinci- " dence equally singular. Our Lady Day, or the

* Pp. 47—52.

" Day of the Blessed Virgin of the Roman Catho- LECT. VIII.
" lics, was heretofore dedicated to Cybele. It
" was called ' Hilaria,' says Macrobius, ' on ac-
" count of the joy occasioned by the arrival of
" the equinox, when the light was about to ex-
" ceed the darkness in duration :' and from the
" same author, as well as from Lampridius, it
" appears that it was a festival of the Mater
" Deûm. Moreover, in a Greek commentary
" upon Dionysius, cited by Dempster, in his
" Roman Antiquities, it is asserted, ' that the
" Hilaria was a festival in honour of the mother
" of the gods, which was proper to the Ro-
" mans."*

Now this state of things, so assuredly prevalent in Italy, is in substance that which history exhibits as common to Christendom during many centuries. It would not be unprofitable, did our limits admit, to trace these corruptions of the christian doctrine concerning the only proper object of worship, historically, and with some minuteness, from the partial indications of them among the early Christians, to their ultimate development at a much later period. But in the place of such an inquiry, a few brief notices must suffice.

Causes leading to those errors observable in the Church from the earliest ages.

That errors of this nature should have been adopted by avowed believers in Christianity, when the christian profession began to present a path to worldly emolument and honour, is not

* Vide Dempster. Antiq. Roman. Annot. ad. c. iv.

LECT. VIII. inexplicable. But it must not be concealed, that many of these vain imaginations, and some even of the most extravagant among them, began to make their appearance long before the church became allied with any secular power on the earth. It was while persecution raged against all men calling themselves Christians, while they rarely seemed to be secure from the captivity of the mines or the fury of the lions as the consequence of their religious character, that the name of Christianity became connected with doctrines, including much more than the germ of every subsequent corruption respecting the direction that should be given by mankind to their religious feelings and services.

This appears from the work of Hermas.

The work entitled "The Shepherd of Hermas," has its place with the epistles of the apostolic Fathers, as they are called; and according to Irenæus, Origen, Eusebius, and Jerome, it was generally regarded by the early Christians as a work of the Hermas named by St. Paul in his Epistle to the Romans. The more critical attention bestowed on such productions in the third century, particularly in the Latin division of the church, led to a frequent rejection of the pretensions of this document to inspiration, and diminished its credit considerably in other respects. The author, we may safely affirm, was not the Hermas mentioned by St. Paul, but a brother of Pius, who, in the second century, was bishop of the church in Rome. "The

" design of the author," says Mosheim, "manifestly
" was, to lead men to believe that his book was
" not a merely human composition, but derived,
" either mediately or immediately, from God
" himself. But it contains such an admixture
" of folly and superstition with piety; such a
" puerile association of the most extravagant
" nonsense with things of a better quality, not
" only in the celestial visions which form the
" substance of the first book, but also in the
" precepts and parables which are put into the
" mouth of the angel and others; as to make
" it wonderful that learned men should ever
" have spoken of Hermas as an inspired writer.
" To me, it is sufficiently plain that he must
" have been an egregious fanatic; or else, as
" is most probable, a man who, in order the
" better to obtain the attention of his brethren
" to instructions deemed by him important,
" conceived himself justified in affecting a con-
" verse with the Divine Being, and superior
" spiritual natures." *

Thus far Mosheim:—but it is to be especially observed, in relation to this subject, that the mixture of folly and superstition which has called forth this merited reprobation, consists, in a great degree, of the introduction of saints and angels as celestial visions; as achieving the most fantastic miracles, for the purpose of imparting

* Mosheim, De Rebus, ante Constant. Seculum primus, sect. 54.

LECT. VIII. symbolical instruction; and, in fact, in the use of a machinery adapted to convey just those impressions of creature, or delegated agency, in the government of human affairs, which had always been the established creed of paganism, and which so soon became the acknowledged doctrine of the church. Throughout this somewhat extended production, the Deity, and even the Mediator, are so distantly, and so very rarely adverted to, amid the obtrusive doings and pretensions of inferior natures, as to seem almost forgotten—the created precluding the uncreated; angels being described as those "to whom the Lord has delivered all his creatures, to frame and build them up, and to rule over them." Yet this work, the theology and the morality of which is every where either false or defective, and in a degree hardly less than on the point we have noticed, was wont to be read, for some centuries from its publication, in the services of the church, through the whole of the east, along with the canonical Scriptures! By the greater number, in every large auditory, it would no doubt be listened to as an inspired document. The inferences to be deduced from this fact, with regard to the sort of piety which had obtained both among the clergy and laity, are many and obvious. The picture it presents is, in all respects, that of *the blind leading the blind*. Such views of the converse taking place between the earthly and the heavenly, approached

the very threshold of idolatry, and left comparatively little to be done when the time came for establishing festivals in honour of angels and of all saints.

Causes which fostered the spirit of creature-worship in the early ages of the Church.

We have seen enough of human nature, in the course of our present inquiries, to be aware that this falling from the exalted theism of revelation, in favour of lower natures, possessing more in common with ourselves, was always to be feared. It is true, revelation itself has taught us that angels *are ministering spirits, sent forth to minister unto the heirs of salvation;* and that we have to wrestle, not merely with *flesh and blood, but with spiritual wickedness in high places.* But how guarded, how chastened, how rational, are all the intimations that occur on topics of this nature in the inspired writings, when compared with such machinery as devised by the imagination or the reason of man! Such natures, when they have appeared as the inventions of the human mind, have never failed to occupy, in effect, the place of the Supreme Nature; and either from gratitude or fear, men have rendered to them the homage due only to the great Source of all being. In the Scriptures, the loftiest seraph is declared to be no more than a fellow-servant with mortal men; and Apollyon himself is a foe who only needs be resisted to be vanquished. Thus the motives to idolatry, from whatever source they spring, and to whatever refinement they may be subject, are all

LECT. VIII. alike precluded. In this system, it is with the immediate hand of God that we have especially to do, and not with an host of intermediate agencies; and it is with him accordingly, that our religious thoughts and aspirations are mainly conversant: *That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.*

The earliest form, perhaps, in which creature-worship presents itself in the page of ecclesiastical history, is in that undue estimate of angelic influence which we have noticed as so manifest in the work of Hermas. Its next step was in the same ill-regulated judgment concerning the merit of any unusual appearance of devotion among believers; especially if characterized by much physical self-denial, and by seclusion from the ordinary affairs of life. But the saint of the wilderness was not so revered an object as the saint of the dungeon; and the last degree of honour was reserved to those who were called to add the glory of the martyr to that of the confessor. These participants in heroic virtue were allowed, while living, to procure a suspension of the ordinary rules of discipline in favour of their weaker brethren; and, when dead, a sanctity was attached to their bodies, to their places of interment, and to their dying sayings, or the compositions that survived them, which prepared the way for still greater error. The

practice of making the tombs of the martyrs the scene of special acts of devotion, owed its prevalence to this feeling, and to the heathen notion, which regarded the spirits of the departed as in more or less intercourse with the earth, and the spot where their body happened to be deposited as being always their favourite resort. From this state of mind, the transition was not difficult into that which led to the treasuring up of relics; to the invocation of beings numbered with the dead; to a belief in their merit and prevalence as intercessors, and in their peculiar guardianship, as exercised in behalf of the individuals and communities who were forward to do honour to their memory, by erecting shrines and churches to their names; and, finally, to the invention of the monstrous dogma, which exhibited this favoured class of persons as having acquired a greater stock of merit than was needed for their own salvation, from which to administer for the salvation of others! So early as the fifth century, all these excesses, except the last, had become common to the whole church; even the images of the saints being general objects of worship, and regarded, in the true spirit of paganism, as partaking of a kind of animated existence, in consequence of some peculiar presence in them of the spirits they were designed to represent — a presence realized by the prayers of the worshipper, and more assuredly by those of the priest. Nothing

LECT. VIII. remained but that these images should possess the power of working miracles; and in the course of time, this, as we have seen, was not wanting.

Some of the evils of this system.

Well would it have been if the Christians of the second, and some following centuries, instead of yielding to this depraved course of things, had duly considered the new position of humanity in the rational system, as brought to light by the gospel—a position taking it out of the hands of the creature, and placing it in those of the Creator. But with the book before them, which said of all creature-worship, *See thou do it not*, they fell from their proper liberty, and became the victims of a degrading and richly-merited bondage.

Nor was this all. As these innovations were contrary to Holy Scripture, they were not to be vindicated by any ingenuous appeal to that authority. Thus a necessity was occasioned for creating a false authority in the place of the true; and this was too soon found in that undefined mysterious power to which the name of the CHURCH was applied. Such a tribunal, set up for such a purpose, would become the ready inlet to a multitude of similar delusions.

It should be observed, moreover, that the degree of fondness with which these fancies were indulged, would determine the solicitude cherished, and, if needed, the effort made in their favour. And the secret consciousness that they

were matters but feebly, if at all, supported by the inspired records, which must often have been felt, could not fail to give a character of harshness and dogmatism to the manner of defending them. Hence the importance so soon attached to church decisions on topics of this description, and hence the intolerance with which such decisions came to be enforced. The fear of loss will always be proportioned to the desire of possession; and men will generally become dogmatic, and the partizans of authority and intolerance, in the degree in which they feel that it would not be safe to confide in more legitimate weapons. It is a hazardous season, not only to every thing ingenuous, but to every thing humane, when men become pledged, and in some degree wittingly, to a bad cause.

The causes which produced it still operating.

Nor must it be supposed in this instance, any more than in many others which have come under our notice, that the cause which we perceive was so injurious to Christianity in distant ages is one in which we have little if any concern. This cause, so powerful in other days, still exists; and though operating under some modification, is still leading multitudes to destruction. When mankind shall cease to be what they have hitherto been, darkened in understanding, and depraved in heart, their views in regard to the proper object of worship will be enlarged, and free from misconception. But in the mean time, the measure in which they are subject to such

LECT. VIII. evils, must be the extent in which they will be deficient with respect to the true knowledge of God. The causes which dispose men to assimilate the character of the Almighty to their own, are inseparable from the present state of human nature; and the paganism which affected the theology of our remote precursors in the christian profession, is not without its influence on our own notions and sentiments, though operating along the distance of many generations. Our prayer accordingly should ever be, that He *who commanded the light to shine out of darkness would shine into our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of his glory, as it shines in the face of Jesus Christ;* that we may not be influenced by *the spirit which is of the world, but by the Spirit which is of God, and so may know the things which are freely given to us of God.*

LECTURE IX.

ON THE CORRUPTION OF CHRISTIANITY FROM THE INFLUENCE OF ANCIENT PAGANISM.

LECTURE IX.

JOHN IV. 23.

The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth.

JOHN XVIII. 36.

Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews.

In the last Lecture we were occupied with a review of ancient paganism, and with an inquiry as to the effect of the pagan systems of antiquity on the faith of Christians in relation to the proper object of worship. In the present Lecture, we are to examine the influence of those systems on the worship, polity, and morals of the christian church; and the extent of this subject demands that our attention should be directed to it without the delay of preliminary observations.

LECT. IX.

Effect of Ancient Paganism on modes of worship.

I. In proceeding to notice the effects of ancient Paganism on the FORMS OF CHRISTIAN WORSHIP, we may remark that ceremonials of some kind have been connected with every thing important in the civil relations and transactions of mankind; and that, in consequence, something of the same description was to have been anticipated in connexion with the new and more solemn relations introduced by religion, and with the more stupendous facts on which these relations are founded.

Civil institutions have their symbolic ceremonies.

We read, for example, of the installations of knighthood, of the inauguration of magistrates, of the coronation of monarchs. These visible observances have existence, as the symbols and seals of these several institutes pertaining to civil society. The knight is raised to be one of a privileged class, and is so raised through the medium of a ceremony designed to indicate his particular elevation, and by means of which the badge of his new rank is to be henceforth attached to his person. The man who is called from among his fellow-citizens to fill the office of magistrate, is vested with a new dignity and new trusts; and the forms of his inauguration, the sword committed to his hand, and the robes in which he is arrayed, all are meant to bespeak the nature of the particular transaction, both in its relation to the individual and society. As the sovereign is chief magistrate, his induction to the higher responsibilities awaiting him is

accompanied by ceremonies of the same character, but of greater splendour and greater solemnity.

Pageants of this nature may be so viewed as to seem to have more connexion with the puerile and the ludicrous than with the august and impressive. But regarded generally, the judgment of the many and the few in every age has attached no small importance to them. Accordingly, the notices of such exhibitions meet us in every page of history, wherever men have risen above the lowest state of barbarism. With the advances of society, forms of this character have multiplied. They make their appearance with almost every new kind of obligation, binding the members of particular fraternities to each other, and lending their sanction to the oath which unites the clan and its chieftain, the vassal and his lord.

This usage to be traced to tendencies in human nature.

There is enough in these facts to warrant the conclusion, that such usages have their origin in some strong and general sympathy of human nature. They seem to constitute the costume and drapery (if we may so express it) in which the mind has ever been disposed to array its abstractions on the matters of social life, so as to bring them into a nearer alliance with the more tangible objects to which they have immediate relation. That attempts would be made to give this sort of visibility to the floating theories of the human mind, on the subject of religion, could

LECT. IX. hardly be doubted. It was probable, moreover, that efforts of this nature, on this subject, would be more elaborate than in the cases we have mentioned, in consequence of the greater elevation of religious truth, and the greater solemnity of its obligations as compared with those involved in the ordinary relations of human life. In the priesthood of every ancient form of religion we see its magistracy; in its different functionaries, from the humblest among them to the supreme pontiff, we see those subordinations of power which obtain in every civil polity; and in the province assigned to every priesthood, as authorities delegated to secure to the power by which the universe was supposed to be governed, a due allegiance, we see the parallel of authorities which exist for the purpose of securing a due allegiance to Cæsar. Thus religion every where appears as appropriating to itself much of the forms and circumstances proper to a worldly kingdom. We expect, accordingly, that it will have its pageants and ceremonies, in common with other kingdoms, and, for the reason named, that it will have them in greater measure.

Effect of these tendencies in reference to religion.

We have seen, in our review of ancient paganism, that what it would have been reasonable to anticipate in this respect is the fact. Religion not only has its ceremonies, but has them to so great an extent that they seem to constitute its substance, embracing nearly every thing that

the multitude of mankind are wont to regard as included in it. From the earliest ages in the history of the church, similar forms meet us continually; and as the professed worshippers of Jehovah become a large and opulent community, their religious ritual becomes more varied, comprehensive, and costly. As the simple observances of patriarchal times were superseded in the ancient world by others more in character with the growing strength and splendour of its states and empires, so did it happen, and by divine appointment, in the solitary channel where the worship of the true God was preserved. The original design of these observances was to serve as expositions, as symbols, and, in some degree, as personifications of certain truths, or of speculations so regarded; and as such they were varied in their language, or, as we may say, in the structure of their composition, according to the enlarged conceptions, and more cultivated taste, of the parties to whom they were addressed. They were the hieroglyphic forms in which truth was embodied and taught, and the more complex they were, the more, up to a certain point, did they bespeak the disciplined thought of the people among whom they had obtained.

The ritual imposed in the New Testament necessarily simple.

We say that up to a certain point only this was the fact. For though a ritual characterised by much artificial arrangement and beauty must ever bespeak a superior state of mental attain-

LECT. IX. ment in the people who have given it existence, or who are prepared to make an intelligent use of it, yet the existence of such means, for the purpose of setting forth the principles or lessons of religion, must always be regarded in the light of a condescension to human weakness. Men should not need such aids, and the characteristic of a perfect economy of religion would be in the total exclusion of such auxiliaries.

On this principle, if the gospel dispensation be the most advanced form in which religion will be known in our imperfect world, it must follow that its ritual will be very limited and simple in its character. If it be *the ministration of the Spirit*, that is, the ministration of a more abundant light and sanctity, it must be one in which bodily exercise will be counted as profiting little. We do not expect perfection in religion in the present state; and, in consequence, we do not expect any dispensation of religion that will be strictly independent of ritual services:—but in its last and best economy below, we are justified in anticipating a union between the most advanced state of the social system, and the simplest forms of external worship; the loveliness and grandeur of religion itself being so nearly and devoutly contemplated as to leave little to be accomplished by means of any observance appealing to the senses.

This evident from the letter as well as

Now this is precisely the state of things we find in the New Testament. We search in vain

the spirit of the New Testament.

for its book of Leviticus. But we need not search long to discover the essentials of christian truth, or of christian character and duty. It says very little about forms, but much about the unseen realities which forms should resemble;—little as to the *mode* in which men should worship the Almighty, but much as to the *spirit* in which it should be done. The fact that the Israelites were furnished with instructions so ample and minute relative to forms of worship, when the servants of God were required to approach him through the medium of a various and extended ritual, was in itself enough to have warranted the persuasion that the dispensation to follow that of Moses would be accompanied by a similar course of instruction on such topics, if a similar order of services was meant to be continued. The absence, accordingly, of such instructions in the New Testament, is conclusive that such services are no longer to hold the place which was once assigned to them; but that they are left to be regulated by the spirituality and wisdom which the gospel will never fail to confer on its sincere disciples, and by those brief injunctions and intimations which it contains in relation to such matters. The language of Paul is strictly to this effect, when checking some unscriptural indulgences among the Corinthians he says—*That which I received of the Lord I delivered unto you.* The brevity, the indirectness, the very looseness observable in the notices

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which occur on such points in the New Testament, furnish evidence, not, as some will contend, that a new power was to be created for the purpose of supplying the imagined deficiency of the Scriptures in this respect, but rather, that the age for elaborate effort and scrupulous attention in regard to mere ceremonies had passed.

Testimony of Lacedæmon and Athens in favour of simplicity in worship.

The great Lycurgus taught the men of Lacedæmon to believe, "that magnificent edifices, and costly sacrifices, were not so pleasing to the gods, as the true piety of their worshippers;" and on this principle excluded all unnecessary expense and pomp from such services. Even the Athenian oracle was constrained to pronounce, that "the honest unaffected services of the Lacedæmonians, were more acceptable to the gods than all the splendid and costly devotions of other people."* We suspect that there was very little that may be properly described as piety or devotion either in Athens or Lacedæmon. But it is evident from the concession of this oracle, that the Lacedæmonians, in cherishing these more reasonable sentiments with respect to the manner in which the piety they professed should be evinced, were an exception to every other civilized community. With the rest of the world, religion was, as it long continued to be among the Israelites, a matter which was to be made attractive by the childish aids of ceremonial similitudes, or pictures.

* Potter, Archæologia Græca, I. 187.

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Fondness of mankind for religious pageantry;—evil to be apprehended from it.

This general fondness of mankind for a religion characterised by pomp and circumstance, is one of the tendencies of human nature from which, as we have shown elsewhere, serious injury was to have been apprehended with respect to Christianity. The danger inseparable from such a state of the human mind must be, lest religion itself be overlooked in the kind of attention and preference bestowed on these inefficient representations of it, and lest a spirit of will-worship, of scrupulousness and intolerance, in relation to such things, should become so far manifest as to leave intelligent men almost excusable in supposing that in the narrow prejudices of such a temper they see the substance and spirit of Christianity. And this, unhappily, is the state in which the profession of the gospel is but too generally found, and from a very early period. The controversy which rose so early, and was maintained with so much pertinacity, with respect to the obligation of the Jewish ritual, afforded sufficient indication of the peril that would beset the religion of the New Testament from this source.

Corruption of the Christian Worship during the first three centuries.

During the first three centuries, while the religion of Christians was so commonly a religion of secrecy, there was comparatively little room for incorporating the complicated and gorgeous ceremonies of heathenism with the simple institutions of the gospel. Nor was the inclination to adopt such admixtures likely to be so considerable while Paganism retained its ascen-

LECT. IX. dency, and employed its power in persecuting the church, as at a later period, when its wasted strength hardly left to it the character of an antagonist. In not a few respects, however, the manner in which public worship was performed, and the sacraments administered, was such, even during this early period, as to betray but too great a readiness to symbolize with customs that should have been left to idolaters.

From the beginning, the christian worship consisted in reading and expounding the holy Scriptures, in the offering up of prayers and thanksgiving, and in the singing of hymns. "On "the day called Sunday," says Justin Martyr, "there is an assembling together of all who "dwell in the cities and country, and the me- "moirs of the apostles, and the writings of the "prophets, are read as long as circumstances per- "mit. Then, when the reader has ceased, the "president delivers a discourse, in which he ad- "monishes and exhorts the people to an imita- "tion of the excellent things they have heard. "Then we all rise, and, in common, send up "our prayers to God. Prayers being ended, "bread, and wine and water, are brought. The "president, in like manner, then offers prayers "and thanksgivings, according to his ability, "and the people express their assent by saying, "Amen. The things which have been the sub- "ject of thanksgiving are then distributed, and "received by every one present, a portion being

" sent by the deacons to the absent. Those who
" have substance, and who are disposed, contri-
" bute according to their judgment, and the
" amount collected is placed with the president,
" who is therewith to assist orphans and widows,
" and all who from sickness, or any other cause,
" are in want; also all prisoners and strangers
" who are among us; and, in general, he is the
" guardian of all who are destitute. Our meet-
" ing on Sunday is because it is the first day,
" that in which God, having produced the ne-
" cessary change in darkness and matter, created
" the world; and because on this day Jesus
" Christ our Saviour arose from the dead. For
" on the day before Saturn (or Saturday) he was
" crucified; and on the day after, which is the
" day of the Sun (or Sunday) having shown
" himself to his apostles and disciples, he in-
" structed them in the matters now submitted
" by us to your consideration."* In this in-

* Καὶ τῇ τοῦ ἡλίου λεγομένῃ ἡμέρᾳ πάντων κατὰ πόλεις ἢ ἄγρους μενόντων ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ συνέλευσις γίνεται, καὶ τὰ ἀπομνημονεύματα τῶν ἀποστόλων, ἢ τὰ συγγράμματα τῶν προφητῶν ἀναγινώσκεται, μέχρις ἐγχωρεῖ. εἶτα τανσαμένου τοῦ ἀναγινώσκοντος, ὁ προεστὼς διὰ λόγου τὴν νουθεσίαν καὶ πρόκλησιν τῆς τῶν καλῶν τούτων μιμήσεως ποιεῖται. ἔπειτα ανιστάμεθα κοινῇ πάντες, καὶ εὐχὰς τέμπομεν· καὶ, ὡς προέφημεν, τανσαμένων ἡμῶν τῆς εὐχῆς, ἄρτος προσφέρεται, καὶ οἶνος, καὶ ὕδωρ. Καὶ ὁ προεστὼς εὐχὰς ὁμοίως καὶ εὐχαριστίας, ὅση δύναμις αὐτῷ, ἀναπέμτει, καὶ ὁ λαὸς επευφημεῖ λέγων τὸ ἀμήν· καὶ ἡ διάδυσις καὶ ἡ μετάληψις ἀπὸ τῶν εὐχαριστηθέντων ἑκάστω γίνεται, καὶ τοῖς οὐ παροῦσιν διὰ διακόνων πέμπεται. οἱ εὐπαροῦντες δὲ καὶ βουλόμενοι, κατὰ προαίρεσιν ἕκαστος τὴν

LECT. IX. structive passage, no mention is made of singing; but that this formed a part of the general services of the early Christians is not only to be inferred from the precepts and examples relating to it in the New Testament, but is evident from the letter of Pliny, which describes the Christians as meeting together for the purpose of singing hymns to Christ as a god.

The extract we have just cited, interesting as it is, is not without its evidence that innovation had already made considerable advances. The practice of mixing the sacramental wine with water, was a departure from the primitive usage; as was the custom of sending a portion of the consecrated elements (for it is plain they were already viewed as partaking of that character) to such as were absent. With such novelties we must reckon the frequent resort to exorcisms, spells, and fastings; the growing aversion to the marriage state; the kind of ornaments which began to be admitted into places of worship; the use of incense; the practice of washing the hands, sometimes the whole body, and the manner in which the cloak was disposed of before commencing public prayer; all of which were instances of conformity with Gentile customs.

ἑαυτοῦ ὁ βούλεται δίδωσι, καὶ τὸ συλλεγόμενον παρὰ τῷ προεστῶτι αποτίθεται, καὶ αὐτὸς ἐπικουρεῖ ὀρφανοῖς τε καὶ χήραις, καὶ τοῖς διὰ νόσον ἢ δι' ἄλλην αἰτίαν λειπομένοις, καὶ τοῖς ἐν δεσμοῖς οὖσι, καὶ τοῖς παρεπιδήμοις οὖσι ξένοις, καὶ ἁπλῶς, πᾶσι τοῖς ἐν χρείᾳ οὖσι κηδεμὼν γίνεται. Et seq. Ap. I. pp. 97, 98. Ed. Thirlbii.

In the same spirit of officious formalism it became usual for Christians to pray with their hands raised and extended, in the form of that great talisman in all their enterprises—the cross. During the interval between Easter and Whitsuntide they were wont to pray in a standing posture, in commemoration of the Saviour's resurrection. At all times, their supplications were presented looking toward the East, in the manner of the heathen, with whom the sun was a principal object of worship; and Tertullian considered it expedient to admonish some of his brethren, that it was not by the strength of their lungs that they gained the ear of the Almighty.

The causes which led to these and other changes in the mode of worship, also led men to attach a special sanctity to particular times and places, connecting them, not unfrequently, with certain customs which became known in ecclesiastical history under the name of *festivals*. Not only were Easter and Whitsuntide thus observed; but many days, memorable in the history of distinguished believers, especially in the case of confessors and martyrs, were thus honoured. The scenes which had been in a manner consecrated by the extraordinary devotion of such persons, became holy in the esteem of their brethren who survived them, and, like their relics, were preserved, wherever it was possible, from desecration.

Before the days of Constantine, the Lord's

LECT. IX. Supper was administered in vessels of silver and gold, and with many circumstances unknown to it in the age of its institution. Feasts were appointed sometimes to precede and sometimes to follow its observance; and being deemed essential to salvation, infants were frequently included among its recipients. This service, moreover, became the great mystery of the christian ritual,—not only as restricted to persons of accredited religious knowledge and character, but as partaking of the secrecy, and the occult efficacy which had been long ascribed to the mysteries of paganism.

But the superstitions connected with baptism in the early ages of which we now speak, were more considerable than those which disfigured the administration of the eucharist. The unbaptized were commonly regarded as persons possessed with evil spirits, and were frequently avoided as such. The persons admitted to this rite, were admitted in the presence of the initiated only; and the imposition of hands, which now formed an important part of the observance, was supposed, to confer at once, the remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. This was not done, however, until the exorcist had employed his various expedients to dislodge the evil principle from within, and thus to remove the great cause of all the believer's previous inconsistency and depravity. But this great work accomplished, not only the soul, but the body, of the baptized person, became capable of devotion

to the service of God, and of being raised to the enjoyment of his presence in the celestial world. In token of the great change thus produced, the baptized returned home adorned with crowns and arrayed in white garments, as sacred emblems;—the former of their victory over sin and the world, the latter of their inward purity and devotion. And as it was usual with communicants to abstain from taking food before receiving the eucharist, so the baptized made a greater scruple of washing after baptism. This was delayed until the baptismal week had passed; and such was the sanctity supposed to belong to the baptismal water, that the bodies of the persons to whom it was applied were carefully wiped, lest any portion of it should become profaned by falling to the earth. On the following Lord's day, the newly baptized made their appearance in church, where they put off their white garments, and received what was called the ablution. These corrupt inventions, be it remembered, with others that might be mentioned, all belong to the period before the civil establishment of Christianity.*

Corruption of the Christian Worship subsequent to the accession of Constantine.

But when the emperors extended their protection to our long persecuted faith, their ill directed zeal, and that of their new spiritual advisers, was such as to obscure the simple beauty of the christian worship by means of so many admixtures

* Mosheim, Eccles. I. 289—294. Priestley's History of the Corruptions of Christianity, II. 81.

LECT. IX. from the customs of heathenism that volumes might be filled with a description of the novelties which were thus introduced. From this time, the rites and pageantry by which the Greeks and Romans had attempted to honour their imaginary deities, might be every where seen, with very rare exceptions, and some trivial modifications, as parts of the established worship of the church; until Augustine could speak of the yoke of christian ceremonies as having become more difficult to bear than that of the Mosaic law. The plea in support of these proceedings was, that they had become necessary if the half-converted multitude were to be retained in any profession of Christianity, and also as the best means of facilitating a conversion of their still pagan brethren. "Hence it happened," says Mosheim, "that in these times, the religion of "the Greeks and Romans differed very little in "its external appearance from that of the Chris-"tians. They had both a most pompous and "splendid ritual, gorgeous robes, mitres, tiaras, "wax tapers, crosiers, processions, lustrations, "images, gold and silver vases, and many such "circumstances of pageantry were equally to be "seen in the heathen temples and the christian "churches."* The chief difference, we may add, was, that these things, instead of having reference to the fictitious deities hitherto worshipped, were now made to refer to angels, and saints,

* Eccles. Hist. I. 393, 394.

and martyrs; so that the new system not only embraced the ritual, but the very polytheism and spirit of the old.

At the same time, the special services instituted in honour of these new divinities, and the five annual festivals commemorative of the principal events in the history of the Redeemer, were less distinguished in the general practice of the people by any cultivation of holy or virtuous habits, than by frivolity, by sensual indulgence, and even by the most licentious criminality. In the ordinary christian assemblies,—so dominant had the spirit of secular ostentation become,—preachers were wont to encourage the people in expressing admiration of the inflated harangues addressed to them, by clapping of hands, and the loudest acclamations, in the manner of an audience in a theatre. The Lord's Supper now began to be administered at the tombs of martyrs, and at funerals; a practice which aided to introduce the performing of masses in honour of the saints, and for the benefit of the dead. The bread and wine also were elevated, before distribution, as objects entitled to the veneration of the people; and the custom of treating the eucharist as a *mystery*, the sacred import of which was not to be explained except to persons initiated as communicants, became more general. The administering of baptism was restricted, except in cases of urgency, to the vigils of Easter and Whitsuntide; and beside the

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uncommanded accompaniments we have already named, lighted tapers were now employed; salt, as the emblem of purity, was also used; and a double unction was connected with the rite, the one preceding it and the other following.*

These corruptions facilitated by converting the pagan temples into churches.

An event which contributed beyond others to this accelerated progress of superstition, was the frequent conversion of the heathen temples into places of christian worship. The fallen state of paganism, which such events implied, produced a false confidence of safety; and, like the Trojans, after having resisted open violence for so many years, Christians fell in love with an idol, without knowing how much mischief it contained. It was the instruction of Gregory the Great, to his missionaries among our Saxon fathers, that, as they had consecrated certain idol temples to the worship of the true God, so they were to allow the continuance of such festivities as had been usual with the people worshipping in such edifices, only informing them that they must regard such convivialities in future as being in honour of Christ and the saints, and not of the false gods whose service they had renounced. This is exactly the course which matters had long taken in similar cases. In all the old pagan temples was the aquaminarium, or vessel for purifying water at the doors. There, were paintings, and statues, of workmanship too exquisite to be destroyed. There, were numerous altars and

* Mosheim, Eccles. Hist. I. 392—399.

censers, and tripods, and votive offerings, and a thousand things beside, which composed the furniture of such places. It was deemed reasonable that many of these ornaments and utensils, particularly such as were thought to be in themselves indifferent, should be retained. The mind which felt no scruple in employing the profane building itself for a sacred purpose, learnt to feel as little in adapting the interior matters of it to the same object. Hence the striking resemblance so often observable, even to this day, between the places of worship dedicated to ancient heathenism, and those dedicated to Christianity. In Italy, and in most Catholic countries, this parallel extends from the quality to the quantity of the supply—the number of churches, like that of the old pagan temples, much exceeding what any rational object could have demanded. In Rome only, there are said to have been upwards of four hundred structures sacred to its ancient deities; and in the modern city and its suburbs, there are now more than a hundred and fifty sacred to the Christian saints.* LECT. IX.

Protestants have restored many of these corruptions.

And it would be well if these aberrations in favour of idolatry were with us purely matters of history, or peculiar to countries, if not to times, separated from our own. But while through the greater part of Christendom the office of Christianity would seem to have been

* Blunt's Vestiges of Ancient Manners in Italy, pp. 86—88.

LECT. IX. to perpetuate the forms of ancient Paganism rather than to abolish them, in our own country —in Protestant England, too much of the same effect is observable. How many things are found in the worship of our state church for which no sanction can be adduced from the writers of the New Testament? And whence should these be traced? Whence the images and pictures which cover the walls of our Protestant edifices? Why has the table of the Lord been converted into an altar of sacrifice, and the name of priest been given to the minister who should only have to do with spiritual offerings—the sacrifices of righteousness? What is meant by these mitres, and these many-coloured vestments; by these white robes, and these chauntings of holy writ from the lips of age and boyhood? Why this special homage to the East; this kneeling to partake of the sacramental bread and wine; and this signing of the cross in baptism? In these things, and in more like these, we have some of the far distant effects of that old and wide-spread Paganism which, in process of time, became so mixed with Christianity as to leave to it scarcely any thing either of the spirit or the external forms by which it was once distinguished.

We must now turn from this brief retrospect with regard to the effect of ancient Paganism on the worship proper to the christian church, to notice its influence on the POLITY or laws of this spiritual commonwealth.

Influence of paganism on the Polity of the Church.

II. And here it may be well to advert, in the first place, to what is taught in Scripture with respect to the nature of the christian church and fellowship.

Import of the word Church.

1. The term in the New Testament, which our translators have rendered by the word *church*, is one which, in its most simple and proper signification, denotes nothing more than an assembly. Even in the inspired writings it is employed to express a gathering of persons into one place, without any reference to the character of the persons so convened, or to the object for which they had met.* But in its conventional, and more general use, it has reference either to the whole body of real Christians, or to some particular society of such persons. Its use, as signifying the ministers of religion in distinction from the people, or as embracing all the persons professing Christianity in a province or nation, is unknown in the sacred Scriptures. We read in the New Testament of *the church at Jerusalem*, of *the church in the house of Priscilla and Aquila*, and of *the churches in Judea* and *the churches in Galatia;* but we meet with no such phrase as the church of Judea, or the church of Galatia. This application of the term was reserved until the time when Christianity became established as a "part and parcel" of the kingdoms of this world. Hooker defines the term church as meaning "a body of

* Acts xix. 32.

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Nature of the Christian Fellowship.

With this change in the received import of the word church, others no less material were connected. In the primitive ages of Christianity the bonds of association among its disciples were all strictly voluntary. Every man who became a part of this visible brotherhood, by a credible profession of the faith of Christ, became such as the result of his own free choice. The great law which prevailed on matters of religion was, that nothing should be done *by constraint*, but every thing with *a willing mind*. That the gospel should be cordially received and openly professed, was an obligation devolved on every man to whom it was made known. But his responsibility in regard to this duty, was a matter having reference to God only, and not to man.

If the Redeemer did not employ the coercive weapons of a worldly kingdom to make his people willing, it was simply because he knew those weapons to be unsuited and unequal to such a purpose. But while passing by the aid of brute force, which can never produce a

willing obedience, as it can never reach the faculties of the mind, he has provided for this object most wisely and abundantly in the economy of the gospel. The truth which it conveys to the understanding affects the heart, constraining the rebellious to submit themselves, and making submission their delight. It seeks the accomplishment of a spiritual end, and seeks it only by spiritual means. The fellowship which it calls into existence is clearly meant to be a fellowship of saints; and one, in consequence, to which no man who was not credibly possessed of that character could be entitled, or at all qualified to share. The church is accordingly described as consisting of a holy community *for whom Christ died*. And whatever the steps were by which the body of believers were led to form this judgment of the persons who were admitted to their society, it is certain that such a judgment was formed of them; and that when circumstances arose to alter this judgment with regard to any man who had obtained a place among them, that person, as being incapable of entering into the sacred design of the christian fellowship, was to be *put away*. *Purge out, therefore, the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened; for even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us. But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or*

LECT. IX. *an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner, with such an one, no not to eat.** This union of the faithful, therefore, resulted from what was peculiar to them as compared with the world, and from what they possessed in common as the disciples of Christ. It sprung at once from the singularity and the sameness of their faith, their experience, and their hopes. What they were in natural capability or acquirement was of comparatively small import; what they were as Christians was of infinite moment; and in this sentiment, which lies at the foundation of christian fellowship, the sincere believer can alone sympathize. Admission into a christian church was not a step connected in any way with secular distinction; and to be excluded from such a body, was not to be placed under any disadvantage as a member of society; while, in every case of admission or exclusion, the freedom of these voluntary assemblies did not consist in a liberty to act as passion or caprice might dictate, but according to their general conviction as to the requisitions of the law of Christ.

One very observable effect of that civil establishment of Christianity,—which resulted in part from the influence of Judaism, and still more from customs which every where obtained in the Gentile world,—was to throw open the institute designed to be especially commemorative

* 1 Cor. v. 7, 11.

and symbolic of the christian fellowship, to the whole people of states and kingdoms. Nor was it enough that the renewal of men *in the spirit of the mind*, the one qualification for christian communion in the early ages of the church, was in this manner dispensed with. Other requisitions were devised by the officiousness of human wisdom, and enforced by the injustice of human authority, the result of which was to substitute another spirit in the place of that by which the connexion of the first Christians with each other had been distinguished. The evidence of genuine piety, which it had been usual to demand from every candidate for admission into this spiritual commonwealth, was superseded by a mere profession of belief in certain scholastic dogmas, and in the mystery of the strange powers said to have been conferred on the christian priesthood.

It is true, even Paganism was not without its terms of communion,—or its conditions of admission to its more sacred observances. Occasions were frequent on which the profane were warned to a distance. But the qualifications demanded were much more ceremonial than moral, and those required as preliminary to christian communion soon came to be of the same description. In our own country, and to this day, we see much of the consequences which have followed from this course of proceeding;—all men being presumed not only

LECT. IX. to be Christians, but Christians approving the established form of Christianity, unless professing themselves otherwise.

Be it remembered, then, that the term church is used in a corrupt sense, when applied in this manner to civil establishments of Christianity; and that the great tendency of such establishments has been to vitiate and even to destroy christian fellowship, as far as it is connected with its great symbol—the Lord's-supper, and as far as it relates to acts of an ecclesiastical character. The communion of saints in such connexions is restricted to the intercourse of private christians with each other.

Independence of the primitive Churches.

2. We have next to observe, that the churches constituted on this strictly voluntary principle, and thus wholly spiritual in their character, were churches possessing each a separate and INDEPENDENT character. If such was not their character, it must have been in consequence of some intrusion on the part of the magistrate, or as the effect of arrangements among themselves.

Province of the magistrate in relation to the Church.

With regard to the magistrate, it is not more certain that the first assemblies of the faithful were convened without his bidding, than that their polity was established, and their affairs conducted, without his interference. The strict independence of these communities, as far as the state was concerned, is beyond dispute. But from the age of Constantine this order of things no longer existed. The protection and

encouragement so long conferred by the laws of the state on its established Paganism, were henceforth to be conferred, and by the same means, on its established Christianity. Thus the new religion became a portion of the empire, and became in consequence a dependent on the supreme authority of the empire. By that authority, all its great representative assemblies were convened; and on the sanction of that authority the decisions of such assemblies virtually rested for all their validity, even when relating to the most abstruse questions of theology.* LECT. IX.

In vindication of this now long-established alliance between the church and the state, it is usual to insist, that while it would have been unnatural in a pagan magistrate to employ the kind of power at his command in aid of the gospel, such a course was imperative on the magistrate professing Christianity. Now it will not be denied that there is an obligation laid on every such person to promote the cause of the religion he has professed, and to do so to the utmost of his ability. But the means must be in agreement with the end, and according to the revealed will of the only Head and

* Some attempt was made by Constantine (Euseb. De Vita Constant. lib. iv. c. xxiv.) and still more by subsequent emperors (Cod. Theodos. VI. 55, 58, 333, *et alibi*) to determine the limits of the civil and ecclesiastical powers with regard to religion. But these theories availed little in the working of affairs, the crown and the mitre being alternately aggressors, according to circumstances.

LECT. IX. Lawgiver of the church. No man is authorized to do evil that good may come; neither is any man to bring strange fire to the altar, or to lay an unhallowed hand upon the ark, on the plea of holding the office of a magistrate. The only weapon of the magistrate is force, he has nothing to do with persuasion. The only weapon of the Church is persuasion, she has nothing to do with force. The great end proposed by civil government must be an outward submission; while that mainly intended by the gospel is an inward renovation. The one authority meddles not with the inclination or the motive, the other makes every thing depend on them. If christian societies should be strictly voluntary, force is an element which must be altogether inapplicable to them; and as the magistrate has nothing else to bring, it follows that no man, *as* a magistrate, can in reason or equity be allowed an influence over them. So long as the men who are known to constitute an assembly professing Christianity are also known to be good subjects, they are entitled to the protection of the civil power, whose shield should be over them alike in their social intercourse and in their religious exercises. But if societies of this nature will look for something more than protection, let them look for something less than independence. Let them descend to become pensioners, and they will cease to be free. And the persons who are so forward in

accusing other men of withholding one half of their obedience from Cæsar, because they thus refuse to make the code of Cæsar their theological guide, will do well to inquire whether they may not themselves be convicted of withholding one half of their obedience from God, inasmuch as the manifest tendency of their own system is to attach a greater value to the inducements of worldly power than to the spiritual sanctions of the gospel; and, in effect, to place the authority of secular enactments above the authority of the Bible. The Churchman who for this cause must charge the Dissenter with being but half an Englishman, might be denounced with equal fairness as not more than half a Christian. What the magistrate owes to Christianity, is the whole of that general influence which pertains to him as a member of society.

Proper relation of Churches to each other.

But while there was so much in the fundamental laws, and in the obvious characteristics and design of Christianity, opposed to the introduction of that kind of power into the church which is entrusted to the magistrate, is there any thing in the Scriptures, or in the practice of antiquity, to justify the conclusion, that the churches of Christ were meant to be dependent on *each other* in matters strictly religious? It is not pretended that the primitive churches were independent of apostolic authority. The apostles were inspired teachers, the companions of the Saviour in his sufferings, and the appointed

LECT. IX. witnesses of his resurrection. Their authority accordingly was peculiar; it could not descend to others, it could not become a precedent to others. With regard to these unerring instructors, no church could profess to be independent without abandoning all claim to be viewed as a society of Christians. But on the death of the apostles, we find every christian church possessing all the freedom of a separate republic. Superiority of any sort, on the part of one congregation over another, is not discoverable in the New Testament, and is altogether unknown through a considerable period subsequent to the apostolic age. On this point we might adduce the language of Gibbon and others, but one authority must suffice. "Neither in the "New Testament," says Mosheim, "nor in any "ancient document whatever, do we find any "thing recorded from whence it might be in- "ferred, that any of the minor churches were at "all dependent on, or looked up for direction "to, those of greater magnitude or consequence; "on the contrary, several things occur therein "which put it out of all doubt that every one of "them enjoyed the same rights, and was con- "sidered as being on a footing of perfect equality "with the rest." *

* De Rebus Christian. Seculum primum, sect. 48. "Whatever the practice might be in later times, as yet (when "the church at Jerusalem was assembled, Acts xv.) no juris- "diction was exercised by one christian society over another;

In states the most free, it is common for persons to be deputed from each, who, together, constitute an assembly representing the whole; and it is usual for the whole, in such cases, to consider themselves bound by the decisions of this general body. But in religious affairs, no body of persons has a right to take upon itself this legislative character with regard to other bodies; nor is any community or individual at liberty to concede such a power to the wisest or the most holy of uninspired men. It would be contrary to that law of accountableness which lies at the foundation of every thing strictly religious. *One is your Master. Let every man be persuaded in his own mind. To his own Master he standeth or falleth.* These are maxims without which nothing can be done—*as to the Lord and not unto men.* But these are maxims certainly contravened by every ecclesiastical association which, not content with the recording of opinions or advice, presumes to legislate on the matters of that kingdom which is *not of this world.* In affairs of mere business, a delegated power of this nature may be expedient and lawful. But on no point where the conscience is concerned, is any such surrender to be made. Men cannot shape their opinions or their feelings so as to make them always agreeable to

" not even by the church of Jerusalem over her children in " Christ." Hind's History of the Early Progress of Christianity, I. 277.

LECT. IX. the pattern which may be set before them by their rulers. And if the statutes of parliament, and the decrees of councils, do not produce this mental conformity, they accomplish nothing having any real connexion with religion. The schemes of civil or ecclesiastical power may be subserved by such enactments; but the interests of religion, as a matter consisting in a certain character of the human mind, are not subserved. It cannot be pretended that any man possessing the means of correct information will be accounted innocent in substituting the falsehood which may happen to be commended by the priest or the magistrate in the place of the truth as taught in the Bible. The men who did so in the apostolic age, whether Jews or Gentiles, are declared *worthy of death*, and are said to have *the wrath of God abiding upon them.*

Growth of the Hierarchy.

3. Among the circumstances which contributed in this manner to make religion an affair of state more than of the conscience, a conspicuous place must be assigned to the changes introduced with respect to the *officers* of the church. Paul assures us, that when the Redeemer left the earth, he constituted those authorities in his church that were requisite for its edification, and they are thus described: *Some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers.* The apostolic office was such as could not be transmitted to the men of any future generation;

the prophetic character ceased necessarily when inspiration ceased; and if the office of evangelist had any subsequent existence, it must have been in the case of persons who were preachers without being pastors. *Pastors and teachers*, accordingly, are the only functionaries instituted by the Saviour with a view to permanence; and both these terms appear, from the manner of their introduction, and from many other facts, to mean the same persons, the office of pastor always including that of teacher.

But it is proper to inquire,—did the apostles make any addition to that number of offices which Paul has enumerated as instituted by the immediate authority of the Redeemer? The office of deacon, it appears, was thus introduced.* We have no hint, however, in the

* The institution of the office of deacon is described in the sixth chapter of the Acts. The language of Peter on that occasion, especially his observation—*It is not reason that we should leave the word of God and serve tables*, implies, beyond doubt, that the serving of tables, which was in future to devolve upon the persons called deacons, or "servants," had hitherto pertained of right, though not always in usage, to himself, and his brethren in the apostleship. It is accordingly noticed as an advantage to result from the new arrangement, that the apostles would then be able to *give themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word*. The great object of the deacon's office manifestly was, to secure those who were called to labour in word and doctrine from secular distraction. The table to be served was that of the poor. We must, at the same time, suppose, from much that is said in the New Testament with respect to

LECT. IX. writings of the apostles as to any similar exercise of their power. The only question, therefore, is, what the word *pastor*, as employed in the above passage, should be understood to denote. "In my own opinion," observes President Dwight, "the word includes a single "class only, spoken of elsewhere in the Scriptures "under the names of elders, bishops, ministers, "teachers, and some others." The word *bishop*, which, beyond controversy, is synonymous with the word *elder* or *presbyter*, occurs in such a manner in the introduction of the Epistle to the Philippians, as to show that more than one person in that church sustained this office; and that among the persons sustaining it there was no official precedence. The epistle is addressed to *the saints in Christ Jesus, which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons.* This language was intended to present a complete

the qualifications of a deacon, that the table of the Lord, and the table of the minister, were to be provided for by the same superintendence; and that the persons sustaining this office were expected to render themselves serviceable to the ministry in some of the departments of pastoral labour. Thus they were not to be *double tongued, given to much wine, or greedy of filthy lucre:* they were to be *first proved,* to be *grave; holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience; of good report; ruling their children and their houses well.* But though the office was recognized by the solemnity of ordination, the care of the poor is the only function directly mentioned in Scripture as pertaining to it.—See a learned and extended note on this subject in Mosheim, De Rebus ante Constant. Seculum primum, sect. 37. pp. 118—125.

description of the church and its officers; and if instead of being so introduced, it had been addressed to the "bishops, *presbyters*, and deacons," every man will at once see the conclusion that would have been deduced from this more orthodox form of salutation. LECT. IX.

Prelacy of human institution.

Indeed nothing save the force of evidence which a wise man must see it vain to resist, could have extorted from the advocates of prelatical episcopacy the concessions which they have often made with respect to the strict equality of the primitive pastors. Under the Tudor dynasty of this kingdom, it was generally agreed that the office and jurisdiction of the prelates were of purely human institution. The statements to this effect which occur in the writings of Gibbon and Mosheim, contain nothing more than had been long since conceded by the most learned episcopalians, and the most devout reformers in this country; and even by our houses of convocation and of parliament. Under Henry the Eighth, these were all parties in affirming, that "in the New Testament, there is no mention of any other degrees but of deacons or ministers, and of presbyters or bishops:"* and in declaring as the consequence, that every shade of official inequality in the pastors of the church, had been introduced "by the laws of men, and not by any ordinance of God." The *jus divinum* of prelatical

* Institution of a Christian Man.

LECT. IX. power was reserved to be discovered by Bancroft, whose sagacity was rewarded by James the First with the see of Canterbury. An alliance was then formed between the divine right of bishops and the divine right of kings; the result was a conspiracy on the part of certain leaders in church and state against the civil and religious liberties of a great people. The effect of this treason in high places is well known.

It was to correct the ambition which had led his disciples to indulge in strife, with respect to those among them who should excel their brethren in honour, that the blessed Redeemer announced, in the most emphatic terms, what should be in this respect the law of his kingdom. *Ye know*, said he, *that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles, exercise lordship over them, and their great ones exercise authority upon them.* BUT SO SHALL IT NOT BE AMONG YOU; *for whosoever will be great among you shall be your minister, and whomsoever among you will be the chiefest shall be servant of all.* When we glance at the long gradation of authorities subsisting in the church of Rome, and in some other churches, who would suppose that the mandates of the Son of God were after this wise?

But while we look in vain to the New Testament, or to the earliest ecclesiastical writers, for the proofs that an hierarchical form of government was meant to be perpetuated in the church; while, indeed, the evidence that does occur is

of an opposite description; it is, nevertheless, unquestionable, that before the close of the second century, a nominal precedence which was occasionally conceded to some one presbyter by his brother presbyters began to acquire an *official* and *permanent* character. It is moreover true, that as the necessary appointment of a chairman in the smaller meetings of presbyters, served thus to create the new order of ecclesiastics afterwards known exclusively by the name of *bishops*, so the appointment of a moderator in the councils which began to be convened in certain districts about the same period, produced the embryo—if we may so speak—of those dignitaries who, subsequent to the age of Constantine, were so extensively obeyed under the name of metropolitans, primates, and archbishops. When things had reached this point, nothing was wanting in order to the existence of that vast platform of ecclesiastical power which was ere long constructed, except the introduction of the patriarchal dignity, which should extend itself in its turn over that of the archbishops; and the appearance among these exalted personages—vieing as they did with the great ones nearest to the throne—of some one possessing the means and the inclination to attempt a division of the world's government with its chief ruler.

These momentous changes originated in corruption, and tended to corruption. The precedence to which learning, experience, and sanctity,

LECT. IX. are ever entitled, was superseded by one, having no necessary, and rarely any actual connexion with these honourable claims to distinction; and the great offices of the christian church were accordingly sought as those of a pagan commonwealth would have been sought,—the main object of the aspirant too often being, a more elevated position in the scale of opulence and power. The function of the primitive bishop, from being every where connected with a single church or parish, and often in the humble form of co-pastor, was to swell forth thus into the flattering importance of a diocesan jurisdiction; and the line of equality once broken, no halting place was found until the successors of fishermen were allowed to tread on the neck of Cæsars! While the inferior clergy occupied the place always appropriate to their order, as a sort of link between the higher and lower classes of society, bishops claimed equality with lords, and metropolitans took their place beside the sons of princes. And when cardinals began to affirm their rank to be the same with that of monarchs, it was but fitting that the pontiff himself should be announced as the king of kings, and lord of lords!*

The parallel we have thus pursued between

* It is proper to remark, that in what is advanced in this Lecture on the subject of church government, a few observations are introduced that were submitted to the public some time since in another form.

the civil and ecclesiastical functionaries of the Roman empire is no product of the imagination. On the contrary, it is altogether unquestionable, that this conformity between the spiritual and temporal authorities, as far as to the institution of the patriarchal power, was the work of design; and a scheme which the first christian emperor was not a little careful to elaborate and perfect. The machinery of a colossal secular government, adjusted under the influence of Paganism, was thus imposed on the christian church; the natural effect of which was to exclude from the polity of the church nearly every thing christian. Before this memorable period, the three orders of bishops, priests, and deacons, had very generally obtained, in the place of the primitive usage which only recognized the two orders—viz. bishops or pastors, and deacons. But all the other offices, whether subordinate to these or superior to them, of which we read in ecclesiastical history, are among the corruptions of the christian institutes which made their appearance after the third century. LECT. IX.

Influence of the people in matters of discipline.

4. The most considerable check to this progress of the aristocratic and despotic forms of power in the church, was found in the large INFLUENCE WHICH HAD PERTAINED TO THE PEOPLE in the better days of Christianity; and in their custom of appealing to THE SCRIPTURES AS THEIR AUTHORITATIVE RULE IN ALL THINGS. We have already adverted to the power vested

LECT. IX. in the members of the primitive churches with respect to the admission of persons to their fellowship and the exclusion of offenders. Pertinacity in serious error was to be followed by exclusion;—*The man that is a heretic after the first and second admonition, reject.* Immoral conduct was to call forth the same extent of rebuke—*Therefore put away from yourselves that wicked person.* And even in less serious offences the same consequence was to follow, if the person offending should make light of private admonition from the offended party, and to the guilt of disregarding the censure of the elders, should add that of neglecting to hear the church. Concerning every such delinquent it is written, *Let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican.* But it is of the first importance to remark, that the act of excommunication expressed the judgment of the church concerning the excommunicated as being no longer a Christian. Nor have we many traces in ecclesiastical history, of its being applied to petty cases of delinquency at the call of resentment or caprice, of avarice or ambition, until what is called church authority, was allowed to pass from the many to the few, becoming at length the exclusive possession of the clergy. In such a state of things, discipline, as in our national church, becomes a mere name; or else degenerates into that odious policy which was once dominant in our bishops' courts; and which, in

the court of high commission under Archbishop Laud, became a yoke on the neck of three kingdoms much too heavy to be borne.

In the choice of officers.

If the influence of the people was of this character with regard to the persons who should be suffered to form a part of their body, it will be natural to presume that it was not less extended with respect to the appointment of the officers who should preside over them. Both these privileges result, and by the most natural process, from the strictly voluntary character of christian assemblies, and both were uniformly exercised by the primitive churches. There was no force, save that of respect for the law of Christ, which could oblige any man to unite himself with a christian church; nor did any power exist that could constrain a people to receive a minister as their pastor who was not the object of their choice. The only provision made for the support of the christian ministry, consisted in the voluntary offerings of the faithful—offerings which no human law was to extort, and which are enjoined in the law of Christ on the assumption that the relation between the pastor and his charge will be one including mutual esteem and affection. But this assumption suggests that the pastoral connexion is one which should always result from mutual preference;—from the approval of the people, and from the returning approval of the object of their choice.

LECT. IX. Apart from considerations of this nature, it would have been a mockery to require that men should bring the doctrines submitted to them to *the law and the testimony;* that they should *try the spirits, whether they be of God;* that they should *beware of false prophets;* that they should *search the Scriptures,* to see whether the things taught as scriptural *are so or not;*—all this would have been out of place and deceptive, if men were not also required to act upon their own conviction of duty in forming their relation to a pastor. Thus from the leading principles in the constitution of the primitive churches; from various notices relative to the practice of those churches; and from that sort of scrutiny which the taught are required to exercise as to the pretensions of their teachers;—from all these particulars it follows, that the connexion between the christian minister and his charge is not to be the effect of external interference and authority, but to flow from mutual approval, that it may include mutual attachment. But men who would spurn the obtrusive power which should affect to deprive them of their right to choose their own physician, or their own attorney, can readily submit that this same power should have the sole appointment of the delegate who should watch for the health of their soul, and minister for the security of their eternal interests!

It is to be distinctly remarked, however, that this power of the people in matters of discipline,

and in the choosing of officers, was by no means legislative, but to be regulated in all things by the supreme authority of holy Scripture. Their province was simply to execute, not to enact. Every christian church was bound to administer the law of Christ, the whole of that law, and nothing but that law. Accordingly, all those laws of ecclesiastical polity and jurisdiction, and all those creeds and rites and ceremonies which are not in agreement with the letter or spirit of this law, are so many forms of reflection on holy writ as an insufficient rule, and so many direct invasions of the office of the Redeemer as the only king and lawgiver in his church. As no church can include a legislative authority, it can have no such power to concede; and, in consequence, is not at liberty to admit the legislative interference of any body distinct from itself. A christian church should know nothing of control either from convocations or parliaments. Its statute book is ever before it, and is unerring and complete.

Manner in which the influence of the people and the authority of Scripture were impaired.

Time would fail us in attempting any detailed account of the manner in which this popular influence was made to give place to more aristocratic forms of administration; and in which this authority of the Scriptures was made void through tradition. We must, however, remark, that the latter corruption was much more rapid in its progress than the former. Through a considerable period subsequent to the civil establishment of

LECT. IX. Christianity, the right of the people to choose their own pastors was more or less respected. Father Paul speaks of this immunity as continuing without the slightest infringement during the first two hundred years; and not only describes it as universally respected to the close of the fifth century, but as a privilege restored by Charlemagne to the cities of his dominions.* But the Scriptures had become a sealed book to the multitude professing Christianity long before the age of Charlemagne—their authority being wholly usurped by that of the church. As the magistrate on becoming the patron of the church invaded its independence, and as the successive lordships which rose within its bosom necessarily attracted to themselves certain powers which had been previously lodged elsewhere, the tendency of the whole course of things thus introduced was to exclude the people, by a slow deteriorating process, from all right of acting, and at length from all ability of judging in matters of religion. It was not possible that Christianity should have been placed in alliance with the civil power, even in the most enlightened states of antiquity, without its being manifestly corrupted. The secular, even then, must have obtruded itself, so as to have obscured the glory of the religious. But in the case now under consideration, it is not only an alliance between the temporal and the spiritual, and one in which

* On Benefices, cc. iii. vii. xv.

the latter is made to bear the strict semblance of the former; but the civil government which comes into this transforming contact with the church, is one burdened and enfeebled with all the corruptions of a most sickening despotism. Well might we exclaim for Christianity as thus enthralled—*Who shall deliver thee from the body of this death!*

Influence of ancient Paganism on christian morality.

III. In proceeding to glance at the influence of the religion of the Gentiles on the MORALITY of the gospel, we must not omit to remark, that ancient Paganism did not meddle with questions of morality in any direct mode. So long as the people were observant of the established ceremonies, and not negligent in presenting the required offerings, the priests, both among the Greeks and Romans, were content that the business of deciding on the general laws of human duty, should be left to statesmen or philosophers. But the latter class of persons, while not displeased with having so noble a science thus freely assigned to them, discharged their obligations in a manner which had more respect to the few than to the many—so much of the curious and the abstract was there in their treatment of moral subjects. Even on the most cultivated, the result of their labours was but too insignificant, partly from the errors and imperfections which attached to all their systems, but much more from their want of agreement among themselves, and from their common want of an

LECT. IX. adequate authority on which to rest even their wisest conclusions. Hence the morals of mankind, after all the deliberations of philosophy, were much less affected by what sages had taught, than by the practical lessons embodied in the ceremonies and fables of their religion. The maxims of the schools were of small weight when placed against the examples set forth in the popular mythology. By the models thus placed before them, the people were charmed as with some romantic fiction, and moulded as by the force of truth.

Leading facts in the corruption thus produced.

A leading feature of the corruptions thus produced, and manifest almost from the birth of Christianity, consisted in the practice of regarding the ordinary duties of morality as subordinate to ceremonial observances; and as being of very much less account than those ascetic performances which with the majority of mankind have always appeared exceedingly meritorious—chiefly, it would seem, on account of their difficulty. From this error, every religion has been in its turn corrupted, and to its lowest root. Much was done by the Redeemer, and by the apostles, to counteract it, and to persuade men that all human excellence must consist in the state of the mind, and in a general conformity of the life to the will of the Father;—and when we see the few and simple institutes of the gospel introduced in the place of the many and burdensome ceremonies of the law, it appears as though

the most effectual precaution had been taken not only to check, but to eradicate this prevalent form of superstition.

But this tendency of human nature, which had acted without control in connexion with heathenism, and which had given so corrupt a character to Judaism as disclosed in the New Testament, was not to be prevented accomplishing its evil work within the pale of the church. Men disposed to substitute bodily exercise in the place of virtuous and spiritual attainment, were not long in devising reasons for such an adjustment, nor in determining the manner in which it should be effected. The consequence was, that the true principles of morality became vitiated among Christians hardly less than in the case of the Jew and the heathen; and while achievements having nothing really moral in them, were lauded as of transcendent excellence, not a few maxims obtained that were subversive of the very foundation of every thing pertaining to moral obligation. This would be sufficiently plain, had we space to dwell on the false confidence which men learnt to place in the christian sacraments; in certain uses made of the sign of the cross; in the homage paid to holy relics; in pilgrimages performed to holy places; in the mere circumstance of parting with property to feed the poor, or to aggrandize the church; and in the different methods of mortifying the flesh, as severe fasting and watching, abstinence from

LECT. IX. marriage, separation from human intercourse, and voluntary pain and torture. The mysticism which favoured the kind of extravagance last mentioned, produced effects almost incredible; and church history abounds with illustrations of the delusion which prevailed in relation to all the particulars we have named.

Nor is it altogether surprising that men who could regard it as praiseworthy to inflict so much hardship on themselves should become intolerant with respect to the infirmities of others. The elements of the ascetic and of the persecutor are near of kin, the monk and the inquisitor being generally found in the same person. The monastic and ultra-spiritual temperament allowed its full influence, will not fail to magnify its reveries and abstractions, and to narrow the sympathies having respect to humanity, so as to prepare the mind for prosecuting its end—so unearthly and seraphic—by means selected without much regard to those dull notions of the proper which serve to govern the ordinary herd of mortals. Among ourselves, justice, truth, and charity, are no where held in less practical esteem than among certain professors who deem themselves greatly more pious than their brethren, denouncing the irreligion of others, either real or supposed, in a manner which clearly indicates how they would have proceeded against it had they lived in other times. It was to meet the demands of this vain, aspiring, Pharisaical

temper, that a double rule of morals was introduced into the church, and even so early as in the second century; the one adapted to vulgar natures, seeking nothing above the common measure of sanctity; the other being more sublime, and framed to lead the devotee into the higher regions of spiritual being—an elevation which too generally meant the possession of such a degree of mystical and superstitious devotion as taught its possessors to judge of the greatness of their piety by the smallness of their philanthropy. LECT. IX.

In concluding this Course of Lectures I cannot forbear to observe, that while the evils associated with the Christianity of remote ages have all, more or less, an existence among us, it is in a diminished and much enfeebled form. We every where see upon them the signs of a state of things which *decayeth and waxeth old*. Lengthened was the interval appointed to precede the announcement of our holy religion to mankind, and a long night of trial has since been allotted to it; but there is much, very much, to warrant hope that the future will constitute the age of its purity and its triumphs;—that, better understood, and more devoutly received, it will pour down its richest blessings on a world in which it has suffered such manifold and protracted wrong. Nor am I aware of any thing that would more certainly indicate the near approach of such a consummation, than a more general disposition Conclusion.

LECT. IX. among Christians to investigate the causes which have served to produce the many corruptions of their common Christianity. If the costly process which has been going on through the last eighteen hundred years has in it any design, it must be to instruct us more profoundly with respect to the weak points of our fallen nature: but the failures of humanity in this new scene of trial must be *studied*, or they will never minister in their proper measure to our warning and improvement.

THE END.

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